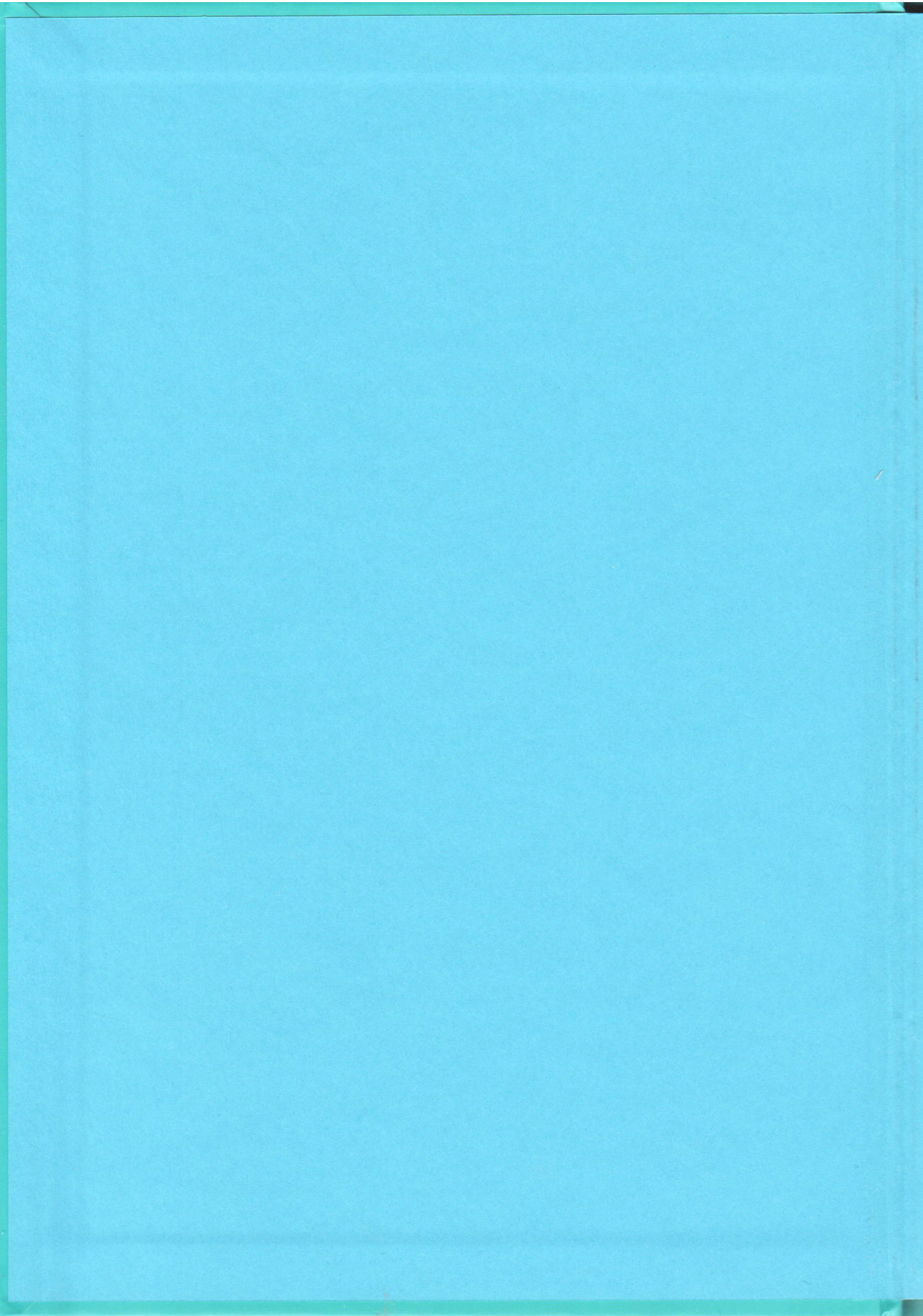




Pet Shop Boys.
Annually.

2020



Firstly, an apology. We suggested in last year's *Annually* that our new album would be released later in 2019 and, as you know, it didn't materialise until this year. We hope you think Hotspot was worth the wait - you can read about the making of it in this book. We also have a report and exclusive photos from the shooting of the "Monkey business" video, an all-singing, all-dancing spectacular which was a lot of fun to make.

2019 turned out to be a rather theatrical year with a revival of *Closer to Heaven* in London and a new show, also written with Jonathan Harvey, called *Musik*, in which Frances Barber reprised her fabulous role as Billie Trix in Edinburgh and London. We also wrote songs and music for a theatrical adaptation of the film *My Beautiful Laundrette*, and you can hear all seven tracks on the CD that accompanies this book.

Our Dreamworld tour starts soon and we hope to bump into you somewhere on the road...

See you soon.

Neil
Chris



Pet Shop Boys, July 2019

Pet Shop Boys. *Annually.*

2020

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News

A year in the life of Pet Shop Boys, including every release, every tour date and current favourite listening.

A new Pet Shop Boys album, *Hotspot*, was released on January 24. It included ten songs: "Will-o-the-wisp", "You are the one", "Happy people", "Dreamland", "Hoping for a miracle", "I don't wanna", "Monkey business", "Only the dark", "Burning the heather" and "Wedding in Berlin". Like the two previous Pet Shop Boys albums, it was produced by Stuart Price.

"We wrote a lot of the album in Berlin," says Neil, "and we said, 'Wouldn't it be great to record in Berlin?'" When Neil had recorded a track with Diamond Version a few years ago, he had recorded his vocal at the legendary Hansa studios. "It was quite exciting, really," he says. "It made me want us to work there. I thought it was a vaguely nice place to work. I think we just quite fancied it. So Stuart came over and we worked in Hansa. Only for about ten days, but we used the old gear lying around – these old keyboards and stuff. We liked the idea of going to a studio with a history."

"David Bowie's Berlin albums, really," says Chris. "Also, a few of the songs were about Berlin as well."

"It was only for about ten days," Neil points out, "but being in Hansa had a profound effect, using this old equipment, as well as what we normally use, and also Stuart recording the reverb of the staircase... the album's got a sound."

"It's dirtier, isn't it?" says Chris.

"It sounds more analogue," says

Neil. "Because it is, actually."

Nonetheless, they did further recording with Stuart Price in Los Angeles, and then mixed the album at the famous Los Angeles studio The Record Plant. "Where they make a lot of r'n'b and hip hop and contemporary pop records, and that had an influence on the sound as well. So that, for instance, on 'You are the one', which is a beautiful ballad, the rhythm track is quite hard. And that goes through the album."

Even after that, Neil and Chris added one more song, "Burning the heather" which they'd been keeping for the next album – Stuart Price came over to London and they recorded it in RAK studios.

Though *Hotspot* is the previously-announced third part of a trilogy of albums with Stuart Price, Neil notes that, "All three albums sound quite different. In that the first one is basically a dance album, the second one is a pop album, and this one... I was going to say it's a rock album, but it's..."

"I would say it's a transitioning album," Chris suggests. "Don't you think it's a bit of a transition?"

"Going where?" Neil wonders.

"Oh, I don't know where it's going," Chris considers. "It has elements of the previous, but then it's moving towards where we might be going next, in terms of a more reflective... well, who knows where we're going to go? But it sounds like an album in transition from the previous two."

"What's interesting is that the key track for the next album was supposed to be 'Burning the heather'," Neil says, "but now we've put it on this album."

The album's title, *Hotspot*, was arrived upon after a prolonged process of consideration.

"That didn't come easy, that," says Chris.

"No," says Neil. "We initially decided that we were going to have a German title. We wanted a German word that everyone knew in English."

"Zeitgeist, for instance," says Chris. "That wasn't on the list, but that would be an example of a German word that we all know. Schadenfreude. Schlager."

"We went through a load of German words," Neil says, "and it didn't really work out."

At one point they considered calling the album either *Camera* or *Kamera*.

"From I Am a Camera," says Neil. "It was on our list."

"We Are a Camera," offers Chris.

"But it didn't look very good," says Neil. "Then one day it occurred to me that Berlin was the hotspot of the cold war, and also hotspot is an internet thing. Also, when I was a kid they used to say, an old-fashioned term for a popular club or somewhere you'd listen to the latest jazz. It just floated to the top and stayed there. I like the fact that *Hotspot*, the title, has a sort of brashness."

Hotspot's history and content is covered in extensive and intimate

Annually.

detail elsewhere in this issue. Diary, on pages 16-29, details the chronology of its creation and Hotspot, on pages 30-43, provides a track-by-track guide alongside the songs' lyrics. The two features also offer complementary accounts of the songs' genesis – Diary is, in the now-traditional *Literally/Annually* fashion, based on the relevant entries from the diary Neil has always kept (these days electronically), but for *Hotspot* Chris also refers to the evolving computer music files for each song, often revealing an earlier history for tracks he had initially worked on alone.

The cover image of *Hotspot* shows the Pet Shop Boys reflected in a mirror in a Berlin art gallery.

"We were going to see the opening of the Olafur Eliasson show at Tate Modern," Chris recalls, "And I said, 'Why don't we have something like that?' Then Neil said, 'Oh, I've got something just like that in my phone.'"

***Hotspot* was also released in** a double CD special edition, the second CD including an instrumental version of the whole album. Neil and Chris hadn't planned to release an instrumental version of this album until they were asked to provide extra content for the Japanese version of the album (a longstanding requirement for Japanese releases where import versions often sell cheaper than the domestic releases) and so they prepared this instrumental version for that purpose. Ultimately their Japanese record company decided that this was too much extra content (the Japanese editions instead included two remixes: "Dreamland (TWD vocal remix)" and "Monkey business (Prins Thomas diskomiks)" but by that time this instrumental album had already been remastered. Around the same time, their British record company Kobalt requested a special edition of the album so the Pet Shop Boys decided to use this.

"It's great," says Neil.
"Some people might think it's better..." says Chris.
"You haven't got the annoying whiny vocals," Neil laughs. "No, it really works well."

The first single from *Hotspot*, "Dreamland", a collaboration with Years & Years singer Olly Alexander that was credited to Pet Shop Boys featuring Years & Years, was released on September 11, 2019. (Physical and digital formats were released on October 25.)

"A very good record," says Neil.
"How did that come about?" Chris reflects.

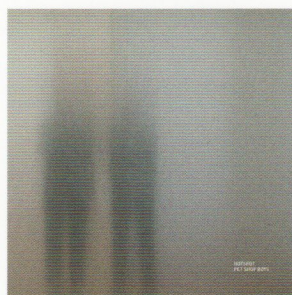
"Our manager, Angela, had a meeting with Polydor," Neil says, "and they were talking about Years & Years, and I think out of that meeting came the idea that we would write with Years & Years for their new album, the one which came out last year. So Olly came to our studio. Anyway they decided not to put it on their album," says Neil.

From then on, it seemed obvious to Neil and Chris that this song should be a Pet Shop Boys single.

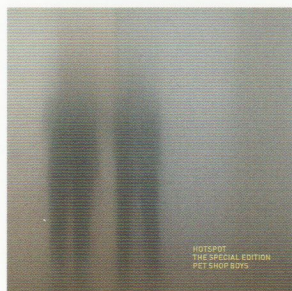
"It's always great when you know that you've got a fantastic record up your sleeve," says Chris. "It's a great feeling. There's none of this, 'Oh, what should the first single be? Have we got a single?' There's none of that. Sometimes you can have a great album but there's no obvious single, or first single. It's great when you've got the first single and you know it's fantastic."

On its release, Olly Alexander offered the following statement: "It was a dream come true to create something with two of my heroes, and spending time with Chris and Neil was an absolute joy. I had to pinch myself repeatedly!"

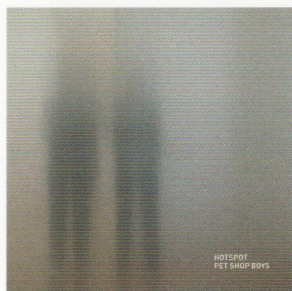
"Dreamland" was available in the following formats: a CD single including "Dreamland", "An open mind", "No boundaries", "Dreamland (PSB remix)" and "Dreamland (TWD vocal remix)"; a 12-inch single including "Dreamland", "Dreamland (PSB remix)", "Dreamland (TWD vocal



Hotspot
Vinyl



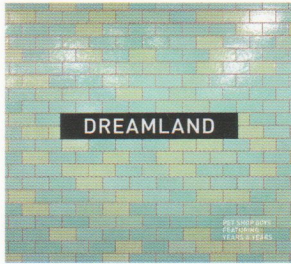
Hotspot
Special edition CD



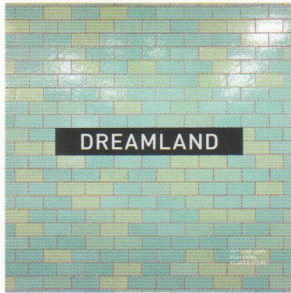
Hotspot
CD



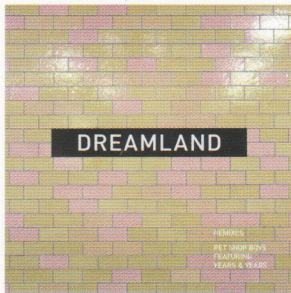
Hotspot
Cassette



"Dreamland"
CD



"Dreamland"
12-inch



"Dreamland"
Digital remixed

remix)" and "Dreamland (TWD dub)"; a digital single including "Dreamland", "An open mind" and "No boundaries"; and a digital remix package including "Dreamland (PSB remix)", "Dreamland (TWD vocal remix)", "Dreamland (TWD dub)" and "Dreamland (Jacques Renault remix)".

"Musically, 'An open mind' was inspired by the death of Avicii," says Chris. "I was sort of channelling him, as a sort of elegy to Avicii, which is why it's got that sort of EDM-sounding riff."

"The song was originally called 'One-track mind', but I thought it sounded a bit sleazy," says Neil. "Then I thought of the idea of an open mind, and how important it is to have an open mind, and to be open about what you do and where you go in your life. When it was finished, I was worried that lyrically it was a bit of a rewrite of 'Being boring': *When we walked in high heels over broken glass in our chequered past / We took two steps forward, one step back / That was our plan of attack*. Because I was writing about the same thing, about my teenage years."

"An open mind" was recorded to appear on *Hotspot*, but Neil and Chris ultimately decided otherwise.

"When we put the tracks together on the album it stuck out as a different kind of sounding record," says Neil. "We talked about it with Stuart and he said, 'Yeah, I know what you mean – it's a bit Xenomania.' That's a good thing, not a bad thing, but it's not what the album is meant to sound like, and when you're making an album you want it to have a cohesive sound. This didn't seem to fit in. But it's an amazing b-side."

"No boundaries" was written for the stage musical *My Beautiful Laundrette* and is discussed further below.

The "Dreamland" sleeve is based upon a visual idea that Farrow Design suggested for the

Hotspot sleeve.

"We'd said to Farrow, 'This is going to be our Berlin album; it's going to have a German title.' We forgot to tell them we'd changed our mind about that, so they'd gone down the German route and they'd found some pictures of U-bahn stations in Berlin."

The sleeve puts the song's title in the same typeface as the Alexanderplatz station's typeface in Berlin – Neil and Chris asked a friend in Berlin to go to there and photograph the station's signs. "Someone had to point out – it never occurred to either of us – that the singer is Olly Alexander, the tube station is Alexanderplatz, so it had a nice synchronicity. We got a friend of ours in Berlin to go to Alexanderplatz and photograph the station."

The second single in advance of *Hotspot*, "Burning the heather", was released on November 14, 2019. (Physical and digital formats were released on December 13.)

It was available in the following formats: a seven-inch single including "Burning the heather (radio edit)" and "Decide"; and a digital single including "Burning the heather (radio edit)", "Decide" and "Decide (CYA remix)". "Burning the heather" features Bernard Butler, who had been previously scheduled to play with them on a prospective orchestral tour of America based on their 2017 Teenage Cancer Trust concert, on guitar.

"Decide" is a song that surfaced at the end of the *Hotspot* album sessions.

"On the last day of recording the album in Los Angeles," Neil begins, "we were at Stuart's studio and about to go back to the hotel, and Chris said..."

"... I said, 'Could you mix this for a b-side?'" Chris continues.

At this point the song already included lyrics, and a vocal, by Chris.

"I did the music," Chris explains, "and I just thought, 'I wouldn't mind putting a vocal on.' I don't do them very often, but I quite liked the

backing track. I just thought it was something to do, really. I mean, I have a lot of time on my hands these days. I don't go out very often."

"Is it not about Brexit?"

Neil asks.

"Not necessarily," said Chris.

"It's about the end of a relationship. But then Brexit's also about the end of a relationship."

(This conversation leads Neil to a further digression about what the song "Decide" would eventually be paired with: "Actually, I read online that 'Burning the heather' was about Brexit. Which was never in my head, and now I listen to it and I think what a brilliant metaphor for Brexit it is. I'm considering saying that that's what I meant by it. But I didn't at the time.")

Neil and Chris worked on "Decide" some more at RAK studios in London. Neil added the line *it's never too late* and then, much later, *It's time to make up your mind*. At one point, there was a discussion about whether the song might even appear at the end of *Hotspot*.

"But Chris vetoed that," says Neil.

"Because it's a b-side," Chris reasons. "It was written as a b-side." He further adds: "Even though there's no such thing as a b-side in the world of Spotify – everything's of equal importance."

The sleeve of "Burning the heather" was taken by Neil in County Durham near where he used to have a house. "We're doing moody pictures," he says.

The third single to be released in advance of *Hotspot*, "Monkey business", was released on January 2. (Physical and digital formats were released on February 7.) It was available as a CD single, 12-inch single and digital download, all including the following tracks: "Monkey business (radio edit)", "Monkey business (Prins Thomas diskomiks)", "At rock bottom" and "Monkey business (friend Within remix)".

"At rock bottom" – "It sounds like a seaside town in Devon: 'Oh, we're going to Rock Bottom for our

holidays," Chris interjects – was one of a sheaf of lyrics which Neil gave to Chris at the beginning of 2018, suggesting that Chris write music for them.

"It's sort of about the opioid crisis in America, people dying of drugs," Neil explains. "That's why it goes: *it's all about, it's all about drugs*. It's rather sad."

"It's quite a clubby-sounding record," says Chris. "It sounds to me like an early house track."

The "Monkey business" sleeve was taken by Chris and is of Neil coming down a flight of stairs in Berlin, after visiting an art gallery.

A "Monkey business" video featuring the Pet Shop Boys was also shot. The full story is on pages 44-51.

In May the Pet Shop Boys begin a new tour, *Dreamworld: the Greatest Hits live*. At the time of going to press, the following dates have been announced:

May 1
Berlin Mercedes-Benz Arena,
Germany

May 2
Oberhausen König-Pilsener
Arena, Germany

May 5
Brussels Forest National,
Belgium

May 6
Amsterdam AFAS Live,
Netherlands

May 8
Leipzig Arena, Germany

May 10
Stuttgart Porsche Arena,
Germany

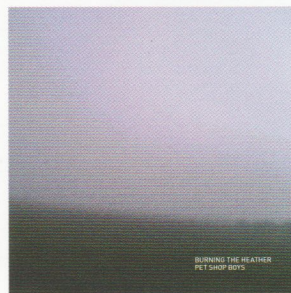
May 12
Vienna Gasometer, Austria

May 13
Prague Forum Karlín, Czech
Republic

May 14
Mallorca Live Festival Calvià,
Majorca

May 19
Munich Olympiahalle, Germany

May 20
Frankfurt Jahrhunderthalle,
Germany



"Burning the heather"
Seven-inch



"Monkey business"
12-inch



"Monkey business"
CD



Sally Bradshaw, Trevor Horn and Neil

May 22

Hamburg Barclaycard Arena,
Germany

May 28

Warsaw Torwar Arena, Poland

May 29

London The O2, UK

May 29

Manchester Arena, UK

May 30

Birmingham Resorts World
Arena, UK

June 2

Bournemouth BIC Arena, UK

June 3

Cardiff Motorpoint Arena, UK

June 5

Newcastle Utilita Arena, UK

June 6

Glasgow SSE Hydro, UK

June 17

Stockholm Ericsson Globe,
Sweden

June 19

OverOslo Oslo, Norway

June 21

Viborg Paradespladsen, Denmark

June 24

Hull Bonus Arena, UK

June 28

Glastonbury Festival, UK

July 11

Bilbao BBK Live Music
Festival, Spain

As noted above, on June 28 the Pet Shop Boys will make their third appearance at the legendary Glastonbury Festival, headlining on the Other Stage on Sunday night. (Aside, that is, from their surprise guest appearance in 2019, described below.)

"We seem to do Glastonbury once every ten years: 2000, 2010, 2020," Neil points out. "They came to see us at the Royal Opera House, and there's been talk about it for quite a long time."

"And of course we were there last year," Chris points out.

"It's the fiftieth anniversary, so it's amazing to be one of the headliners for that," says Neil. "Diana Ross is on the same afternoon and Taylor Swift is on the main stage when we're playing. Paul McCartney is on the night before. So it's quite a big deal."

As well as the above tour, in September the Pet Shop Boys will go on a co-headlining tour of America with New Order.

The impetus for the collaboration was Chris's. It seemed like the sort of concert I would like to go to," he explains. "And I thought, if I'd like

to go to it, I imagine a lot of other people would like to see that. It's a great double bill. Also we like them."

"So really the impetus was that it would be fun," says Neil. "It's quite exciting, actually."

The planned dates, which honour wherever possible New Order's touring policy that they have three days off between each city, are as follows:

September 5

Toronto Budweiser Stage, Canada

September 9

Boston Rockland Trust Pavilion, USA

September 11

Philadelphia The Mann, USA

September 12

New York Madison Square Garden, USA

September 15

Columbia Merriweather Post
Pavilion, USA

September 18

Chicago Huntington Bank Pavilion, USA

September 20

Minneapolis The Armoury, USA

September 24

Vancouver Pepsi Live at Rogers
Arena, Canada

September 26

The Gorge, Washington, USA

September 30

San Francisco Chase Center, USA

October 2

Los Angeles Hollywood Bowl, USA

October 3

Los Angeles Hollywood Bowl, USA

On March 14, 2019, the Pet Shop

Boys appeared with Trevor Horn's band at his Roundhouse Gala 2019 charity concert.

"Trevor asked us to do it," says Neil. "We went to rehearsal the day before and Trevor had apparently told the band something like 'these two guys are very particular...'" says Neil.

"So they'd been primed," says Chris. "Then when they asked a question I was, 'Oh, whatever... just do whatever you do,' and they were, 'Oh...'"

They performed "Left to my own devices" and "It's alright", both featuring the opera singer Sally Bradshaw who sang on the songs' original album versions.

On June 29, 2019, the Pet Shop

Boys appeared as surprise guests towards the end of The Killers' headline set at Glastonbury.

"We were in Los Angeles in February, working on the album with Stuart Price – we were having a barbeque in the garden, actually – and suddenly the phone rang," Neil recalls. "Stuart said, 'Brandon's about to phone you up and say will you do two songs at Glastonbury.' We went, 'Oh, no...' as usual. Then he phones up: 'Hey, how's it going? How's Stuart's barbeque?' and then he said he wanted us to do 'Always on my mind' and 'Human'. So of course we said yes. Of course these things are always in the future and then suddenly they move rapidly into the present."

Beforehand, they scrupulously kept their appearance secret.

"We hadn't told anybody that we were doing this," says Chris.

"So afterwards we had all sorts of people complaining that they didn't know," says Neil.

In preparation, first they

went shopping.

"We went to Louis Vuitton, and walked downstairs to the menswear because Chris had heard about the new guy who's designing it now," says Neil.

"I just was aware that Louis Vuitton has been doing very unusual menswear, with Virgil Abloh... so we went downstairs and there was the hat," says Chris.

"We said, 'Well, there it is.'" Says Neil. "The guy said, it's the only one in the country. That was a real result, seeing that hat. Then we went round the corner to Celine where I got the parka."

"Then I went out again and bought Rick Owens boots and top," says Chris.

"They're good, those boots," adds Neil.

"They're now part of the look," says Chris. "They're the look of this album. They'll be with us for the next two to three years."

"What was good was that having bought those things we then did a photo session for the album promotion in those clothes," says Neil.

"It's quite satisfying when you can go out and buy a whole look that kind of works," says Chris. "We did that for the last album as well, in LA, near where we were staying – they had the hat and the glasses."

Then, the night before Glastonbury, Neil and Chris travelled down to The Killers' concert at Cardiff Castle where they rehearsed both their Glastonbury songs at the Cardiff soundcheck – a medley of these two songs had been arranged by Stuart Price using the Pet Shop Boys arrangement of "Always on my mind".

"It was very, very hot,"

Chris recalls.

"Very hot indeed," Neil concurs.

On the night, it all went smoothly enough.

"It worked very well," says Neil. "Though I could not remember the words of 'Human' so I had to have them stuck on a speaker... I think Brandon thought it was quite unprofessional. If you watch the TV broadcast, you can see me looking at them."



Backstage with The Killers and Ezra Koenig of Vampire Weekend at Glastonbury

"They're very loud on stage," Chris observes. "Really loud."

"And Brandon is a very loud singer," says Neil. "I was really worried that I was 'doing a Madonna', when she sang out-of-tune for the Eurovision Song Contest. I couldn't really hear myself, because Brandon was singing with me. I'd asked the monitor engineer to take Brandon's

vocals out of my ears, but that was after we'd rehearsed and he didn't take them out, and so when Brandon sang I couldn't really hear myself. If you watch on television I keep taking my in-ears out, and all the way through the performance I thought: 'Am I singing this whole thing unbelievably out-of-tune?' When we came off the stage we had to approve the footage for the BBC to show again, and when we looked at the BBC footage I was extremely relieved to discover to my astonishment that I wasn't in fact singing out-of-tune. Because nowadays with social media it can suddenly turn into some meme. It all worked fine, but you do worry about these things."

"It was fun being at Glastonbury," says Chris. "I got to stay in one of those Airstream caravans. It was really great."

"I stayed in Bristol," says Neil.

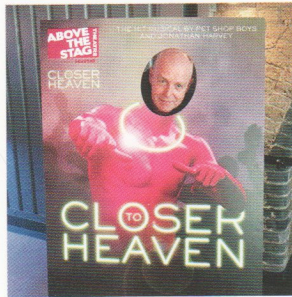
"I didn't want to do that drive all the way back to Bristol," says Chris. "The first person I saw when I arrived was David Beckham. I didn't speak to him. But that whole enclosure is so nice. In the morning I had a full English breakfast. And I went to the Shangri La area. It's an amazing thing that they build this huge place. I had a really good night, and where I was staying was really quiet after the main stage had finished. I thought I wouldn't get any sleep but actually it was really quiet and I had a really good night's sleep."

"It was a beautiful night," says Neil.

"And we've just had nothing but good weather," says Chris. "Festival organisers should book us just for the weather."

The Killers were also joined onstage by Johnny Marr. Brandon and Johnny had never met, and so they were introduced beforehand by the Pet Shop Boys. "I heard them rehearsing in the dressing room for about ten minutes," says Neil. Then all three of us, me, Chris and Johnny, were standing backstage. It was quite an experience really."

"We met some of Brandon's family," says Chris.



At Above The Stag Theatre

"One of Brandon's brothers proudly said, 'You know, it was me who had the Pet Shop Boys' records that Brandon used to listen to,'" says Neil. "He was taking full credit. They were all so sweet afterwards: 'That was awesome...'"

On July 3, 2019, the first preview of a new production of the Pet Shop Boys and Jonathan Harvey musical *Closer to Heaven* opened at the Above the Stag Theatre in Vauxhall, London. The theatre had been putting on a season of Jonathan Harvey's plays – earlier in the year Neil and Chris had been to *Boom Bang-a-Bang*: "Our favourite Jonathan Harvey play, about people having a party while they watch the Eurovision song contest," – and had now reached *Closer to Heaven*.

"This is a show that is now, astonishingly, 17 years old..." says Neil.

"It's a period drama," Chris observes.

"... but all of its attitudes made more sense now. The drugs, the sexuality. At the time it was more sort of slightly trying to be deliberately shocking, whereas now it doesn't seem shocking anymore. And the cast were really good."

After attending a dress rehearsal Neil and Chris felt that the music didn't sound as good as it might have; the original musical director Chris Nightingale came in, and the original programming was dug out and used. And for this new production, the director Steven

Dexter made some significant changes to the show's storytelling.

"He actually made more sense of the plot," says Chris. "We now understand how Straight Dave gets the money to pay for Mile End Lee's debts, which wasn't completely clear before."

The show was extended for a second month; every performance sold out.

"It was a good experience," says Neil.

"It was." Chris agrees.

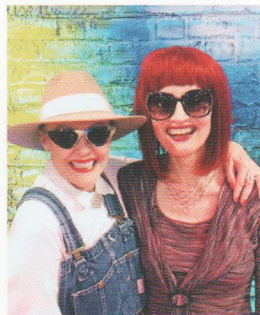
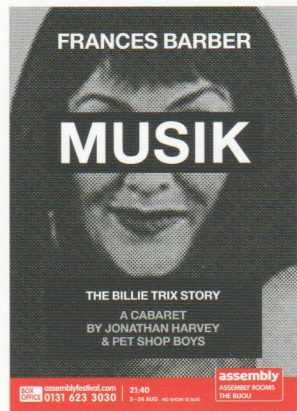
"There's something sort of intriguing about it," says Neil. "It's amazing when you talk to people in theatre they always say, 'Oh, yeah, I saw *Closer to Heaven* in the Arts Theatre.' And normally they say, 'Oh, I really enjoyed it.' Whereas of course it has the aura of being a great disaster and all the rest of it. This also seems to have kept the show going for another production at some point. And because of these changes that the director made, Jonathan's now going to rewrite some of the script."

On August 5, 2019 the one-woman show, *Musik*, with a script by Jonathan Harvey and songs by the Pet Shop Boys, opened at the Assembly Rooms, Edinburgh, as part of the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. Starring Frances Barber, it reprises and greatly expands upon the role of Billie Trix she memorably played in the original 2001 production of *Closer to Heaven*.

"The idea of *Musik* has been around since *Closer to Heaven*," says Neil, "because Chris and I liked the character of Billie Trix and we thought that Jonathan wrote for her so well. We'd thought for ages: Wouldn't it be good to have a show where she just talks and sings a few songs? Frances always wanted to do it, Jonathan didn't want to do it. Then Jonathan changed his mind."

"I think it was good to have a long gap, actually," says Chris, "and then we could go back and revisit this character."

"Yes, so do I," Neil agrees.



Clockwise from top: Frances Barber onstage as Billie Trix; show poster; the two Trixes – Frances and Adele Anderson; Jonathan Harvey, Frances and Neil at Radio 2; Jonathan, Frances and Neil before dress rehearsal in Edinburgh; Frances on stage



Onstage at Radio Two Live In Hyde Park

"Though I never thought it would happen, by the way. But we had dinner last year, and the four of us – Chris, me, Jonathan and Frances – put it together, really. We started by going through everything we know about Billie Trix – from *Closer to Heaven* but also from the sleeve notes of 'Run girl run' which has got a ton of back-story in it, which Jonathan wrote." ("Run girl run" was a song that didn't actually appear in *Closer to Heaven* but which was sold as merchandise at the theatre, a Billie Trix seven-inch single that was purportedly her protest single against the Vietnam war.) "I think that's when Lenny Snatch first comes into the picture. And then we talked through other bits, we invented the story about Andy Warhol – we talked about it, all three of us. And we wrote the song 'Mongrel'. I had the idea for a lyric, 'Mongrel', I sent it to Chris and Jonathan, and the same evening Chris wrote the music for it. Suddenly we had an opening song!"

For a while the show itself was going to be called *Mongrel*; a poster was even designed with that as its title. "We decided it was too ugly as a title," says Neil.

"It looked great on the poster, though," says Chris.

After Jonathan wrote a first draft

of the script, other songs emerged: "Jonathan had the idea of the 'Soup' song, and I think 'Ich bin Musik' was Jonathan's idea too. Then I remembered that we had a song lurking around from 2003, 'For every moment', which originally was going to be a duet with us and Elton, and then we gave it to Alcazar but they broke up before they could record it."

Two previously-written Billie Trix songs, "Friendly fire" and "Run girl run", were also included.

Rehearsals took place at the Above The Stag Theatre rehearsal room while *Closer to Heaven* was on.

"So there were suddenly two Billie Trixes," Neil points out.

"And we had a preview there where Frances invited all these actors like Ian McKellen and Derek Jacobi and Simon Callow. Simon Callow gave Chris and I notes... he had a good line: 'What is the spine of the piece?' And suddenly there we were in Edinburgh, opening in a circus tent. In Britain there are six of them – they're made in Germany and they're called Spiegel tents, and they're very, very solid and they're very beautiful."

"They're so atmospheric," says Chris.

"It's always interesting when you do something and then an audience

watch it," says Neil. "Jonathan's script is very funny, but you never know whether people might just find it sort of over-the-top. But the first preview was fantastic, everyone roaring with laughter. When she said 'I made a movie once in Paris, *The Masturbation of Race*' the audience applauded..."

"They knew the record!" says Chris. "And then the poster appears of the film."

"That's a great moment," says Neil. "The funny thing about the Billie Trix character is that you suddenly want to see *The Masturbation of Race*. Frances got this guy who she met on the internet to do the artwork."

"It really is Jonathan at his very best," says Chris.

The songs were recorded in their studio with Frances and Pete Gleadall, and on August 6 they were released digitally and on streaming services. "Run girl run" is a new mix using the original vocal; "Friendly fire" is re-recorded.

"Frances was very interesting to work with," Neil reflects, "because she got into character. With 'Ich bin Musik', we had a couple of goes and then we went out for lunch, and I said, 'It needs a bit of sex in the voice,' and she said, 'Oh, Donna Summer "Love To Love

You Baby”, and she came back and sang it.”

The show ran until August 24 in Edinburgh, and then had a five-night run in London at the Leicester Square Theatre beginning on September 3. It then returned for a further four-week run at the Leicester Square Theatre on February 5.

On September 15, 2019, the Pet Shop Boys headlined the one-day festival Radio Two Live In Hyde Park in the centre of London. They had been asked to do this sometime around the previous October, at a point when they imagined that their new album would be out around the time of this show

“I knew it was quite a big deal,” Neil reflects, “because I saw Kylie do it last year. I thought she put on a good show. I was quite impressed, actually. And I thought, ‘What would we do if we did it?’”

Once this question became a real one, Neil and Chris debated for some time whether this should be the first show of a new touring production, but eventually realised that this wasn’t practical. Conferring with director Es Devlin and choreographer Lynne Page, they decided that the show should be based on the *Super* show, but with some different songs and with a different running order. To that end, they took the version of

“Suburbia” from the beginning of their 2009 Brits Awards performance, and then segued it into “Burn”, and Lynne Page did new choreography for “Heart” and for “Vocal”. (“Very musical theatre,” says Neil.) Olly Alexander agreed to perform their brand new single, “Dreamland”, and they also invited Beverley Knight, whose version of “I’m Every Woman” they’d been impressed by at the Trevor Horn Roundhouse concert in March. In putting together the show, Neil adds, “You’re aware you’re also doing a TV show.”

“Olly Alexander was great,” says Chris. “He looked amazing.”

“He was very good,” Neil agrees. “He hadn’t done any rehearsal because he was filming a TV drama series, so we rehearsed it in the dressing room beforehand. Beverly Knight did come to the dress rehearsal.”

The performance was widely considered to have been a triumph.

“When we got on the stage I was amazed at how big the audience was,” says Neil. “Even though I actually knew that there were 49,000 people there, or something like that, it still looked pretty epic from the stage.”

“It was a lovely day,” says Chris. “Imagine that event in the rain – that’s what I kept thinking. We were very lucky. Because it wasn’t very nice the day before, or the day after. And it was gorgeous.”

There was, however, one brief glitch at the very beginning.

“Some people said, ‘Oh, I saw you on the television, I could tell you were nervous at the start,’” Neil adds, “It wasn’t that I was nervous, it was that I got on my disc, I looked across and Chris wasn’t on his.”

“I kept saying ‘Should I not be going? Should I not be going? Should I not be going?’ and then it was too late,” Chris explains. “I wasn’t cued on. Anyway, I just jumped off before it came round.”

“That threw me,” says Neil. “Then I saw that Chris was there, and so it was fine. But I was disconcerted. And also my disc,

which was being used for the last time... At one of the last concerts in Asia it messed up.”

“There’s a lot of potential for a Spinal Tap moment with those discs,” says Chris.

“Yes, there is,” Neil agrees.

“The motors can freeze,” Chris points out.

“And it’s normally mine that does it,” Neil says. “You can feel it slowing down. And so I thought, ‘Please God, don’t do it on the television...’”

On the day, they didn’t mingle with the other artists playing before them, although they did hear, sitting outside, some of Status Quo’s set.

“Whose bass player, lest we forget, played on the seven-inch b-side of ‘West End girls’,” says Neil. “He wasn’t in Status Quo then.” (John Edwards first joined Status Quo in 1986.)

On September 14, the night before the Hyde Park show, the Pet Shop Boys played a warm-up show at the London club venue 229.

“Chris suggested we do a surprise show in a club,” says Neil. “We’d been to see Leelee John of Imagination do a solo show in this place on Great Portland Street. And so we decided we would do that.”

“That was really good fun,” says Chris. “Just us and the musicians.”

They played through the exact Hyde Park set, though, as their future guest stars weren’t there, Neil sang all of “Dreamland”, and Dusty Springfield’s vocal was used for “What have I done to deserve this?”

“The audience just sang all the way through,” says Neil. “It was nice because they all seemed to know ‘Dreamland’.”

“Well, it’s a bit anthemic,” says Chris

“It was a lot of fun, and then we had a bit of a party afterwards downstairs in the venue,” says Neil. “I enjoyed it, but then of course we had to do the show the next day.”



Warm-up for Hyde Park, at 229

On September 20, 2019, the first preview performance of the play *My Beautiful Laundrette*, with music by the Pet Shop Boys,

opened at the Curve Theatre in Leicester.

My Beautiful Laundrette was originally a 1985 film written by Hanif Kureishi. Earlier in the year, Neil was asked by a mutual friend, Jon Savage, whether Kureishi could have Neil's email address: "He said he was doing a stage adaptation of *My Beautiful Laundrette* at the Leicester Curve Theatre, which originates a lot of productions that come to the West End." Neil and Chris met with Kureishi and the play's director Nikolai Foster, and agreed both that the production could use some of their '80s records and that they would write some new instrumental music. They had time to do this at fairly short notice only because they had been working on a prospective new project with *The Most Incredible Thing* choreographer Javier de Frutos, but when the time that they had set aside to work on music for this came around, the project hadn't advanced sufficiently for them to have anything useful to write. So instead they went to Berlin and worked on *My Beautiful Laundrette*.

"They said what themes they wanted and we wrote them," says Neil. "Then they wanted a song at the end."

"We didn't really understand at this point how the music was going to be used," says Chris, "but we just carried on regardless, just wrote what we imagined."

"Then we turned up to dress



My Beautiful Laundrette poster



Neil and Martha Wainwright onstage, *A Not So Silent Night*

rehearsals several months later," says Neil. "They use it as linking one scene to another..."

"... apart from the club scene," says Chris.

"There's a lovely bit where they take a bit of the gated keyboard from 'Johnny's dark side'," says Neil.

"We gave them all the stems," says Chris, "and like most theatres now they have a sound designer, so they can just take little elements and position them around the place."

Even though the play is set in 1985, some of the historical Pet Shop Boys' songs used date from slightly later. The full list is: "West End girls", "I get excited (you get excited too)", "Left to my own devices", "Hit music", "In the night", "Opportunities", "Later tonight", "Tonight is forever" and "Paninaro". There are seven new pieces by the Pet Shop Boys: "Omar's theme", "Angelic thug", "Johnny's dark side", "Night sings (Popa's theme)", "Johnny's theme" (an instrumental version of "Angelic thug"), "Beautiful laundrette" and "No boundaries" (which uses the same music as "Omar's theme"). "Omar's theme" includes a friend of Neil's saying "I love you" in Punjabi, subsequently slowed down on the track. (The friend originally sent it from his phone from work, but it wasn't sexy enough so he had to go downstairs

to Costa Coffee to record a satisfactory version.) "Beautiful laundrette" is based on the Bobby 'O' version of "I get excited".

Of the two songs with vocals sung by Neil (and heard in this form during the play's performances), "Angelic thug" "is about the white skinhead character, Johnny – *he's an angelic thug: talks dirty, looks so pretty, got a handsome mug, he's an angelic thug*", and "No boundaries" – "Title suggested by Mr Chris Lowe," says Neil. "It is meant to sum up the message of the play, which is that love has no boundaries." These seven songs are available exclusively with this issue of *Annually*.

On December 6, 2019, Neil appeared at *A Not So Silent Night*, an event held at the Royal Festival Hall in London by Rufus and Martha Wainwright in memory of their late mother, the singer Kate McGarrigle. The annual event is in aid of the Kate McGarrigle Fund for Sarcoma. Neil performed two songs. The first was McGarrigle's "I cried for us", which he first performed at a memorial event soon after McGarrigle's death in 2010, in an arrangement by Chris, and which was subsequently recorded as a Pet Shop Boys b-side – here it was sung as a duet with Martha

Wainwright. The second was the Pet Shop Boys "It doesn't often snow at Christmas".

Neil was approached by Rufus Wainwright and his manager and asked to appear. They suggested he sing "I cried for us" and he suggested the suitably seasonal "It doesn't often snow at Christmas". "We had our backing track," says Neil, "but the band played along with it, and then Rufus and Martha and other people sang along for the chorus." Dan Gillespie Sells from The Feeling was the show's musical director.

"I was vaguely dreading it," Neil confesses, of the whole event, "because it's so different from what we do – they're all singing folk songs and Christmas carols. They had everyone sitting on the stage all the way through, and I thought, 'I'm not doing that.' But actually I really enjoyed it. It was a three-hour concert, and I worried that it might be boring but I actually ended up watching all of it. Chrissie Hynde was there – it's always nice to see Chrissie Hynde. Linda Thompson was there. Guy Garvey from Elbow was there, and had a drink with me and my sister afterwards – he was very nice."

A recent movie, *Blinded By The Light*, prominently featured "It's

a sin" on its soundtrack.

"We were approached through our publishers and told that there was a movie being made about an Asian boy in Luton who becomes a convert to Bruce Springsteen's music in the '80s. They wanted the film to start with 'It's a sin' as a representative track of the '80s. Because of the nature of the story, we were a little bit suspicious whether the story was saying 'Can you believe this guy used to like '80s music but now he likes really good Bruce Springsteen?' but it actually doesn't quite say that. We saw the script, and the director was very, very nice about it, so we said yes."

"Originally they wanted it in the trailer," Chris points out, "and we said no. They used 'Don't You Want Me'."

Neil has seen the movie.

Chris has not, though he says that he has seen the poster "on the side of a bus".

Neil and Chris are sad to note the sudden death on December 24, 2019, of the songwriter Allee Willis, who was best known for co-writing "Boogie Wonderland" and "September" for Earth Wind & Fire, co-writing the theme song

for the TV show *Friends*, "I'll Be There for You", and also co-writing "What have I done to deserve this?"

"We first met Allee Willis in 1984 when Tom Watkins was managing us. Tom had met Allee Willis in Los Angeles and he was getting involved in her visual art career. He told us about her and when she came to London we met here. Then it was revealed that she'd co-written "Boogie Wonderland" by Earth Wind & Fire. We were just frightfully impressed by this fact – I'm still impressed by it. And then either she or Tom suggested that we wrote a song together. We ended up going to EMI studios and we wrote 'What have I done to deserve this?'. It has three bits and I think we basically each wrote a bit, but I always thought Allee wrote the best bit which is the Dusty bit: *Since you went away...* After that, we occasionally used to see her in Los Angeles. I remember one Halloween – I think it was in 1990 when we were promoting *Behaviour* – we went out in West Hollywood with Allee Willis and Cyndi Lauper, the four of us. She was famous for having parties. She lived in this amazing temple of kitsch."

"It was one of the old studio party houses," says Chris. "She was a very talented songwriter."

RECORDS

Each issue of Annually includes a list of the Pet Shop Boys' five favourite records to listen to, at the time of going to press. Currently they are:

Neil

Taylor Swift
"The Archer"

Cigarettes After Sex
"Don't Let Me Go"

Patrick Gowers/John Williams
Stevie (Original Motion Picture Soundtrack)

Post Malone
"Circles"

Beck
"Stratosphere"

Chris

Meduza (feat. Goodboys)
"Piece Of Your Heart CYA Extended Remix"

Sigala & Becky Hill
"Wish You Well (Benny Benassi Remix)"

Agoria, Solomun, Blase
"You're Not Alone (Solomun Remix)"

Solardo & Eli Brown
"XTC"

Billie Eilish
"everything i wanted"

Diary

Neil kept a diary during the period over which Hotspot was written and recorded, and as usual Annually is printing a comprehensive day-by-day account of the process, adapted from this diary. (Further details, particularly in cases where Chris had earlier written music on his own, can sometimes be found in the complementary Hotspot feature on pages 30-43 As is also traditional, these diary entries have been annotated by Neil and Chris, showing how the work evolved, and offering details of the many other songs created along the way, including those for the stage productions Musik and My Beautiful Laundrette, as well as sundry other insights.

June 24, 2014.

Worked in Berlin all day, writing new song "Monkey business". Neil made lunch.

Neil: This album starts during the last album.

Chris: There's an overlap.

Neil: This day we wrote "Monkey business". What we don't yet have is the bridge.

Chris: Or the middle bit. But we've got the main body of the song.

Neil: Me making lunch doesn't happen very often, by the way, readers.

Chris: It's very good when it does, though. It's normally scrambled eggs...

Neil: ... avocado...

Chris: ... a bit of tomato. Maybe if there's some ham in the fridge...

Neil: ... maybe some ham, yes.

Chris: Neil does very, very good scrambled eggs. A little known fact.

Neil: The key to scrambled eggs is: don't put anything in them. Don't put water. Don't put cream. Break the eggs into the pan... most people use butter, I don't normally eat butter so I have olive oil... stir them around, and when they're still just liquid, add salt and pepper, serve.

Chris: And the good thing about that is, it saves extra washing up of a bowl.

Neil: And they taste more eggy. I got that from the famous British cook Elizabeth David. There's about five things I can make. I can also roast a chicken, and of course I invented the grim stir fry, obviously – my great contribution to world cuisine. Which is no longer grim. As I've said before, the classic grim stir fry, which was really grim, was brown rice, watercress and soy sauce – that's it.

Chris: Not even an onion?

Neil: No, when the onion was introduced was

when the grim stir fry really ceased to be grim. Because that gives it a lot of flavour.

June 25.

Put down a mix of "Monkey business" and "Will you love me?"

Neil: "Will you love me?" still hasn't appeared.

June 26.

Chris does a new song "Circo Loco".

Chris: Named after the club. That was done using exactly the same sounds as "Monkey business".

Neil: "Circo Loco" turned into "Pazzo!" so there's a sort of link between "Pazzo!" and "Monkey business". A year later, on June 25, 2015, when we added the line "Pazzo!", the sounds were so similar that I wrote in my diary that it had "started off as a mix of 'Monkey business'".

Chris: Which was incorrect.

Neil: Yes. But the sounds are the same.

Chris: I often do that – I often just use exactly the same sounds as for the previous song, because it saves getting up new ones. I'm lazy. Can't be bothered getting up new sounds. What was wrong with the sounds on the previous one? I mean, if you're a rock band, you don't say, "Could you just get a new bass guitar for this song?", "Could you get a new drum kit for this song?"

Neil: I think "Monkey business" didn't get used on *Super* because we thought the song was incomplete. And we didn't need it. Also, we weren't totally convinced by it, and we sort of went off it a bit too. But we thought it was catchy and we always remembered it. And we always had this idea that Mick Jagger should sing it, and one day, walking down the street, I was singing it to myself and I thought, "Well, if The Rolling Stones did it, it would



Olly Alexander with Pet Shop Boys at Sarm

sort of go... ” [Neil sings the new bridge to demonstrate] and I sang that into my phone.

January 12, 2015.

In London studio. Put down a mix of “Clean air hybrid”, then worked on “You are the one” from an idea sung on my phone.

Neil: There’s a few tracks from this period that haven’t appeared. “Clean air hybrid” is psychedelic. It’ll probably be a b-side. “You are the one” is an idea that occurred to me walking down the street.

January 13.

Worked on “You are the one” all day.

Neil: What happened around this point was that Chris wrote the melody of the verse.

Chris: It started off as a dance track. It only became a ballad in Los Angeles.

Neil: We spent ages working on it. It was very chirpy. At this point, I could have imagined Taylor Swift singing it. I mispronounced “Zehlendorf” as this point. But some of these original vocals are on the finished record.

January 14.

Worked on “You are the one”.

January 15.

Carried on working on “The one I want”.

Neil: That was the new name for “You are the one”.

January 16.

Neil re-sang chorus vocals on “The one I want”. Put down a mix. Chris started to write a new track, “A cloud in a box”.

Chris: I wouldn’t have called a song “A cloud in a box”.

Neil: No, I did, but you wrote the track.

Chris: On the computer it’s called “The cloud”.

Neil: That day I was going to sing the vocal for “A cloud in a box” but we couldn’t get the microphone to work. “You are the one” was one of the songs we had that we decided were too poppy for *Super*. There’s another song, which we still haven’t released, a super-pop song from the Taylor Swift range, called “Method in your madness” that’s just too poppy.

May 26.

Started song for Thilo Heinzmann’s wedding.

Neil: This became “Wedding in Berlin”.

May 27.

Finished wedding song.

Chris: It’s pretty much all there.

February 8, 2017.

Olly Alexander came to the studio in London, had coffee and chatted then started to write a song together, “Dreamland”. Went out for lunch and then carried on working on the song.

Neil: I don’t think we wrote any demos in 2016.

We were on tour. Even 2017 was a pretty slim year.

Chris: But it's a pretty important year, because this is when you get "Dreamland".

February 9.

Carried on working on "Dreamland" with Olly. Went for lunch. Finished the demo.

February 10.

Working with Olly at the studio. Started a new song, "Waiting", but didn't get very far. Emre and Mikey from Years & Years arrived. Played them "Dreamland" and chatted, then all went for lunch.

Neil: "Waiting" never emerged. It's not even a finished demo. Though Chris and I came back and I sang on it.

Chris: It's really nice, "Waiting". From our chill-out album, for an Ibiza sunset.

April 28.

In Berlin. Started working on a mix of "Hotel Home", a song by Molly Nilsson.

Neil: It's a great record. Joel Gibb played it to us. It's a very loose recording and we tried to do a pop mix of it.

April 29.

Working on the mix of "Hotel Home".

Neil: Unusually, for us, on a Saturday.

May 1.

Working on a mix of "Hotel Home".

May 2.

Working on a mix of "Hotel Home".

Went to JustMusic, trying to buy a guitar.

May 3.

Working on a mix of "Hotel Home".

May 4.

Finished parts of "Hotel Home".

May 5.

Chris sent parts of "Hotel Home" to Goetz for him to mix. Started to work on a new version of "New boy in town".

Neil: "New boy in town" is a song that is from 1984 that is contemporary with "Rent" from the Ray Roberts studio days – it could even be the same day as "Rent". I'd taped it off my cassette player. Chris put down a new backing track, and I finished off the lyrics and sang it – the lyrics had never been finished. Our remix of "Hotel Home"

has never been released because we weren't happy with it. It didn't have the magic of the original track.

May 6.

Neil sang vocals on "New boy". Put down mix.

Neil: The beginning sounds like Burt Bacharach. It's about two teenage girls. It's just loaded with sexual desire, and it's terribly sad. Pete Gleadall did a good mix of it – it's got a very lovely melody, I think. And the verse is not really like a verse.

November 21.

In Berlin. Worked on a new song "Only the dark" until 6 o'clock then went to Saturn.

Neil: Saturn is a famous German electrical shop.

November 22.

Put down instrumental of "Only the dark" then started writing new track, "Any longer". In the evening, watched two episodes of W1A on DVD.

Neil: "Any longer" has never been released.

November 23.

Carried on working on "Any longer". Neil sang short vocal idea. In the afternoon, continued working on "Any longer".

November 24.

Carried on working on "Any longer". Put down a mix, then spent a while doing a new edit of "The one I want" from 2015, which didn't really go anywhere. Went and looked at the Christmas lights in the Ku'damm.

November 27.

Wrote a new song, "You know where you are with winter".

Neil: That's a very sweet song. It's about low expectations. It's a Christmas song about how winter doesn't actually let you down the way the summer can.

Chris: Unless you're waiting for some snow. I feel let down every winter.

February 14, 2018.

In Berlin. Neil sang duet vocals for "Dreamland", recorded by Pete Gleadall. Chris played music for various lyrics Neil had sent him.

Neil: Pete had arrived before us to install new software. With "Dreamland", on the first demo it was just Olly singing it, and I'd sung a few backing vocals. We lowered the key for me to sing it, and had

to pitch-change Olly's vocals, but it didn't sound as good so we changed the key back and I just sang it really high. Later in the day, after Pete had gone back to London, Chris played these other songs.

I'd written a load of lyrics, almost like poems, and I'd sent them to Chris, and that day Chris played to me the music he'd written. "Burning the heather" was one of them. Another one was "What are we gonna do about the rich?". Also "Collector's item".

Chris: And "Wallish Walls"?

Neil: Yes, that's named after a place in County Durham.

Chris: And "At rock bottom".

Neil: Yes, that was one of them too. Oh, there's another one, too, which is quite sad: "A change is as good as a rest".

February 15.

Holger came to look at the wi-fi router. Worked on "Collector's item" and put down a mix.

Neil: "Collector's item" is a song we haven't released yet – it's a satirical song about collecting limited editions of things.

Chris: It's really good.

Neil: We considered putting it on *Agenda*, but we didn't.

February 16.

Worked on a new song "You've got me all wrong". Neil sang the vocal to the melody Chris has written. Went out for lunch then Neil continued "You've got me all wrong".

Neil: "You've got me all wrong" is "Burning the heather".

February 17.

Worked on "You've got me all wrong". Added a middle eight and various musical parts. Went out for lunch then worked more on "You've got me all wrong".

Neil: Working on Saturdays again! We never used to.

February 18.

Worked in the studio on "You've got me all wrong". Changed the title to "Burning the heather". Neil re-sang most of the vocals and added harmonies in the chorus. Chris added shaker and tambourine. Put down mix.

Neil: Sunday! This is simply unknown!

Chris: The shaker and tambourine won't be real, by the way.

February 19.

Neil re-sang a few lines of "Burning the heather".

Put down mix. Chris got up the music he'd written for "What are we going to do about the rich?". Neil sang the choruses. Went out for lunch with Chris Zippel. Back in the studio, Neil sang the verses for "What are we going to do about the rich?". Put down a mix of "What are we going to do about the rich?".

February 20.

Neil re-sang the verses of "What are we going to do about the rich?" with lyric changes. Put down a mix. Went out for lunch. Chris got up the music he'd written for "Mongrel", a song for the Billie Trix show. Neil sang vocals on it.

February 21.

Carried on working on "Mongrel" then put down a mix. Got up the music Chris had written for "Wallish Walls"; Neil sang vocals.

February 22.

Neil sang harmonies on "Wallish Walls". Went out to JustMusic and bought new keyboard for the studio. Worked on "Wallish Walls" and put down a mix.

February 23.

Got up "Only the dark". Chris transposed it into a better key for Neil to sing to. Neil made lunch. Walked up to the Tiergarten and had a coffee. Neil sang vocals on "Only the dark". After dinner, came back at half past ten and Chris suggested working on a new track which became "Will-o-the-wisp". Neil wrote lyrics and sang vocal.

February 24.

In the afternoon, worked on "Will-o-the-wisp".

Neil: Another Saturday! We're working every day! What is going on?

February 26.

Finished work on "Will-o-the-wisp"; put down a mix. Put down a mix of "Only the dark". Started work on "At rock bottom". Went out for tea; very cold. Worked more on "At rock bottom". Went out for dinner then put down "At rock bottom". Watched an episode of Curb Your Enthusiasm.

Chris: Neil can't really watch that at night – it winds him up so much that he can't get to sleep afterwards.

Neil: That's true. The whole humour is the humour of frustration and anger, isn't it? And I share the frustration and anger. Whereas when you watch *Frasier*, everything's always resolved in *Frasier*.

March 19.

In London. Snowy outside. Neil sang vocals on "You know where you are with winter".

March 20.

Neil started to sing vocals on "A change is as good as a rest". After lunch, Neil sang the rest of the vocals on "A change is as good as a rest". Connor came round to improve the internet connection and succeeded. Neil sang chorus on a track Chris had written, "Rewind".
Neil: "Rewind" became "I don't wanna".

March 22.

Worked on "I don't wanna" then bought a rug for the studio. Carried on working on "I don't wanna". Put down new mix for Neil to write lyrics to.
Neil: The rug made a big difference to the room.

March 23.

Worked on "A change is as good as a rest", adding a chorus. Neil re-sang the vocals, and we changed the name to "Travelling". Then went to the Electric Ballroom to see a concert by High Contrast.
Neil: The chorus of "Travelling" sounds like it's by Snow Patrol is the fact of the matter.
Chris: Morten Harket would sing that well.
Neil: Affy, our drummer, was playing with High Contrast.
Chris: He's a drum'n'bass artist, and he was really good. We went for a drink with him afterwards in the Amy Winehouse pub.
Neil: The Hawley Arms.

March 26.

Put down a mix of "Travelling". Started a new song, "Happy people".

March 27.

Neil sang more vocals on "Happy people" and recorded spoken vocals; put down a mix.

April 4.

Chris worked on a new track which became "In the moment". Went out for lunch. Neil put vocals on "In the moment". Got up "Happy people"; Neil spoke new verse lyrics.
Neil: "In the moment" is the song Stuart said sounds like "Tel Aviv beach music", whatever that means.
Chris: I mean, what's wrong with a Tel Aviv beach party? I've been to a party on the Tel Aviv beach and really enjoyed it.

April 6.

Got up "In the moment" because Neil didn't like his lyrics. Chris wrote a new section, Neil wrote a new melody and words and it became "A sense of time". Worked on it until six o'clock.

April 9.

Got up "The new boy" and edited it. Neil sang some backing vocals. Put down a new mix. Then got up "Travelling" and changed the structure to have one more chorus then sent it to Pete so that he could update the mix.
Neil: As we've said before, Pete Gleadall takes our rough mixes and does a more polished mix of them when we've finished writing a song.

April 10.

Got up "Sense of time". Made a new structure for "Sense of time". Neil sang vocals.

April 11.

Put down a new mix of "Sense of time" and sent it to Pete to mix. Neil wrote verse lyrics for "I don't wanna". Chris went to the dentist to have wisdom teeth extracted.
Neil: Was that painful?
Chris: No.
Neil: Because I'm meant to be having them done.
Chris: No, they came out really easily. Two of them.

April 12.

Neil sang verse vocals on "I don't wanna". Went out for lunch. Neil sang more vocals on "I don't wanna". Put down mix. Worked on making a piece of music Chris had written into a new song, "The forgotten child".

April 13.

Decided not to proceed with "The forgotten child". Chris put down instrumental mix and called it "Paradise lost". Went out to lunch. Came back to studio and decided not to work any longer.
Chris: Good idea!

April 19.

In Berlin. Neil not feeling very well; in bed all day. Chris wrote a new track and Neil spoke one line on it: and I was like...
Neil: It's quite good, "And I was like". Stuart doesn't like it. He wanted us to change it all. I love the brass line. I'd love to have real brass do that.
Chris: Yes. It'd be good to get Kim Kardashian to say, "and I was like..."

April 23.

Worked in the studio on "And I was like", adding chorus vocals and editing structure. Neil made lunch. Put down mix of "And I was like". Went out for tea.

Got up "Paradise lost" and renamed it "Forgotten child". Worked on a slower version in a different key.

Neil: Chris showed me the chords for it and I played it on the piano, and then we took the original and put it at the end.

April 24.

Worked on "Forgotten child"; Neil sang vocals.

Neil made lunch. Carried on working on "Forgotten child". Chris put down a mix. Went out and bought some headphones.

Neil: I made lunch two days running!

April 25.

We went out shopping in the morning. Got up "And I was like" and added more brass and vocal harmonies, put down a mix.

April 26.

Neil sang new vocals with changed lyrics on "Sense of time" and "Will-o-the-wisp".

April 27.

Chris got up "Frühling". Neil sang chorus vocals on it and it became "Beautiful mistake". Went out for a walk and then came back and put down a mix of "Beautiful mistake".

Chris: We've gone Latin. This is not Neil's cup of tea. We should get Gloria Estefan. Or Jennifer Lopez. It's a party tune. It didn't make the album – it doesn't sound very "Berlin". That's the sort of thing we need! A really naff "holiday in Benidorm" type record to give us a hit. With a really naff title. We could call it "Benidorm": "Beni-Beni-Benidorm". And then you do a video where everyone's doing the conga on the seafront at Benidorm. Now that is how you have a hit record: a fun video and a catchy nonsensical moronic chorus. It's the sort of thing we've veered away from, for some reason.

May 24.

Back in Berlin. Got up Chris's demo, "Say goodbye", which became "One track mind". Neil wrote lyrics and restructured song. Went out for lunch and went for a walk. Neil sang vocals on "One track mind".

May 25.

Worked in the studio on "One track mind". Changed the key. Neil sang revised lyrics. Went out for tea. Neil sang harmonies on the chorus of "One track mind".

May 28.

Worked all day in the studio on "One track mind" and put down a mix. Chris started to work on an extended mix of it. Very hot in Berlin. In the evening, watched an episode of Frasier.

Chris: Because Neil had decided that he couldn't watch any more *Curb Your Enthusiasm*.

May 29.

Very hot day again. Worked all day on extended mix of "One track mind".

May 30.

Still very hot. Made changes to the extended mix of "One track mind". Neil sang some revised lyrics. Put down an extended mix and then a revised seven-inch mix of "One track mind". In the evening, went to Tempodrom to see a concert by LCD Soundsystem.

Neil: It was good.

Chris: One of them wore a dress.

May 31.

Chris got up the extended mix of "One track mind" and made a correction to it. After lunch, worked on "He's not coming home", an old demo of Chris's. Neil sang vocals. Put down a rough mix of "He's not coming home". After dinner, watched two episodes of Frasier.

June 2.

Worked on "He's not coming home". Neil sang lyric changes and backing vocals. Put down a mix.

Neil: "He's not coming home" is, as Pete Dinklage remarked when mixing it, very, very sad.

Chris: Isn't it about knife crime?

Neil: It is.

Chris: The next album can all be a bit more doom 'n' gloom, can't it?

Neil: Yes. Though this is a bit b-side-y, maybe. It's got a guitar sound I like.

July 12.

Neil had cough and cold. Worked all day at studio on new song "Hoping for a miracle" based on a track Chris had written on a piano in Trouville where he went on holiday.

Chris: It wasn't Trouville, it was Le Touquet.

Neil: I have it written down wrong.

Chris: Yes, the song was originally called "Le Touquet". I wouldn't have written it except that there was a piano in the Airbnb house.

Neil: It's got a very good chord change. I always imagine Eminem rapping over this.

Chris: It'd make a great backing track for a rapper.

I just sat down and played it, and thought "that's quite good", and wrote it down on a piece of paper, because I thought I was bound to forget it. And I recorded it on my phone.

Neil: Were there other people in the room?

Chris: There will have been.

July 13.

Neil still had a cough and a cold. Carried on work on "Hoping for a miracle". Neil wrote more lyrics. Went out for lunch. Came back and worked on "Hoping for a miracle" until about seven o'clock, and put down a mix.

Neil: The following day I went to Sheffield to see the Dusty Springfield musical written by Jonathan Harvey.

August 30.

Neil went to studio in London. Pete Gleadall recorded new vocals for "Hoping for a miracle". Chris dropped in for a while. Neil replaced one word – "Zehlendorf" – on "The one I want", then sang new lyrics on "One track mind" which became "An open mind".

Neil: I decided "One track mind" sounded sleazy.

September 19.

In London. Worked all day on a basic demo of "Give stupidity a chance".

September 20.

Worked all afternoon on "Give stupidity a chance", changing the arrangement.

Neil: It started off sounding slightly folky, and then today Chris put a beat on it, which changed it all.

September 25.

Neil recorded lyric changes for "Give stupidity a chance" with Pete Gleadall.

October 10.

In London. Chris got up a track he'd written and it turned into "On social media". Worked on "On social media" all afternoon.

Neil: I think I'd already written the lyrics for "On social media".

October 11.

Alex Needham arrived at the studio and interviewed Neil about his book, One hundred lyrics and a poem for The Guardian. Worked on "On social media". Neil sang a new middle bit.

Neil: That's the interview where Chris burst in at

the end of it, complaining about the rubbish outside.

Chris: Which has been dealt with.

Neil: I phoned up the council to complain.

October 12.

Worked on "On social media" all day. Chris added a vocoder chorus. Went out for lunch. Put down a mix of "On social media".

Neil: "On social media" didn't actually have a chorus and Chris created one out of the vocoder part he put on.

October 18.

Worked on "On social media" all day, changing the structure.

October 19.

Jonathan Harvey came to the studio to discuss the Billie Trix Edinburgh show then went out for lunch. After Jonathan left, worked more on "On social media", changing the structure again.

November 4.

In Berlin. Walked to Hansa studios. Stuart was there with the engineer Nanni and the assistant Max. Stuart had set up a band in the studio: drums, vocals, bass, keyboards in separate isolation booths. Worked on "I don't wanna". Neil sang revised lyrics.

Chris: We're making the album!

November 6.

Walked to Hansa on a beautiful sunny morning. Stuart was working on "Wedding in Berlin" all day. Went to a nearby baker for lunch then stopped to look at the last remaining East German watchtower. Neil sang revised lyrics to remove references to the original wedding it was written for.

November 7.

Walked to Hansa. Another warm sunny morning. Neil sang new lyrics on "Wedding in Berlin". Worked on "You are the one". Stuart put on new rhythm track and then Chris suggested making it more romantic; this worked.

November 8.

Walked to Hansa. Worked with Stuart on "Will-o-the-wisp" all day long. In the evening, went with Stuart to the Verti Music Hall to see Deadmau5.

November 9.

Walked to Hansa. Stuart got up "Happy people" and started to work on that. Neil caught taxi home to get the lyrics for "Happy people" then got the U-bahn

back to the studio. Recorded new version of the lyrics. Then caught the U1 to record ambient sound for "Will-o-the-wisp".

November 10.

Walked to Hansa. Stuart played an edit of the U-bahn recording from the day before. Worked on "The one I want".

November 12.

Walked to Hansa. Stuart worked on "An open mind" all day long. Neil sang new vocals with lyric changes.

Chris: We should point out that Stuart liked to go to the same place for lunch and dinner every week. So if you went for kebab on a Monday night, you had to go for a kebab on the following Monday night at the same place.

Neil: Yes, that's true. It's very Stuart. Stuart likes a structure.

Chris: He gives a structure to everything.

Neil: So, for instance, on *Electric*, we worked on the songs in alphabetical order.

Chris: It's quite good, because you thought, "Ooh, I'm looking forward to my kebab tonight..." in fact I've been looking forward to it all week".

Neil: Also, we went to a chain called Hasir, and because we went to one of them he would not go to the one we know is better, in case he was disappointed.

November 13.

Walked to Hansa in the rain. Stuart working on "Dreamland".

Chris: Quite often we'd stop off for a cup of coffee on the walk, in case anyone's interested.

Neil: Almost every day, in fact.

November 14.

Walked to Hansa in the rain. Stopped off for a coffee. Stuart working on "And I was like". Worked on it for the rest of the day, adding spoken and sung vocals. Went out for lunch. (Brexit deal announced by Theresa May after Cabinet meeting.) In the evening we went to the Astra Kulturhaus to see John Grant in concert. Went backstage afterwards and he signed a copy of his new album for us.

November 15.

Walked to Hansa. Stopped off for a coffee. Stuart working on "Hoping for a miracle". Spent hours writing a middle bit. Chris played piano on it. Went out for dinner with Stuart.

November 16.

Walked to Hansa. Stopped off for a coffee. Stuart working on "Collectors' item". Neil re-sang the lead vocal, changing lyric from "you" to "I". Walked up to the Christmas market at Potsdamer Platz for lunch. Stuart got up "Monkey business" and Neil sang new vocals. Caught the U-bahn with Stuart to Nollendorfplatz.

Neil: With "Collectors' item", I was trying to make the joke against me.

Chris: I remember that lunch in Potsdamer Platz well. We had a bratwurst.

Neil: That was the last day. Stuart went home the next day, and I watched the Bros documentary *Bros: After The Screaming Stops* on Amazon Prime. The day after that, Chris and I both watched it on the studio computer.

Chris: And then we watched it again in Los Angeles.

December 3.

Went to Brighton to start working with Tim Powell on "Give stupidity a chance". Checked into hotel then walked back to Tim's and worked on "On social media", and a little on "What are we going to do about the rich?". Went to The Ivy in Brighton for dinner.

December 4.

Brighton. Worked with Tim on "The forgotten child" and "What are we going to do about the rich?".

December 5.

Checked out of hotel. Worked with Tim on "Give stupidity a chance" and "On social media" then went back to London.

December 13.

Gary at Farrow emailed designs for Agenda.

December 17.

Downloaded Jeremy Wheatley mixes of the Agenda tracks. Neil went to Stella McCartney's in Fulham road and bought a suit.

Neil: He'd been mixing them in his own studio. I've still never worn that suit.

Chris: Why did you buy it?

Neil: I was going to wear it for something specific, and then I didn't. I'll wear it at some point.

January 13, 2019.

Flew to Los Angeles.

January 14.

Heavy rain in Los Angeles. Went to Stuart's studio,

listened through to tracks from Berlin, worked on "Will-o-the-wisp".

January 15.

Listened to what Stuart had done on "Wedding in Berlin" then had lunch. "Working on "Wedding..." then "Happy people". Brexit deal defeated in the House of Commons.

January 16.

Worked in the studio with Stuart on "I don't wanna" then got up "Monkey business".

Neil: "Monkey business", we did a lot of the work in Los Angeles.

January 17.

Heavy rain. Worked on "Monkey business" with Stuart. Neil wrote new lyrics then sang them.

January 18.

Carried on working on "Monkey business" with Stuart. Later got up "You are the one" and discussed getting Angelo Badalamenti to write an orchestral arrangement for it.

Neil: That never happened.

January 21.

No hot water in rented house. The plumber came. Lunch with Stuart and then worked on "The one I want". Stuart took a photo of Neil and Chris for Annually.

January 22.

Worked on "An open mind" all afternoon, changing the structure.

January 23.

Worked on "An open mind", cutting out the third verse, then got up "And I was like" and came up with some new vocal ideas. In the evening, watched Bros: After The Screaming Stops.

January 24.

Worked with Stuart on "And I was like", decided not to put it on the album. Got up "Dreamland" and Stuart worked on it.

January 25.

Listened through to all the album tracks with Stuart – very happy with how the album is sounding. Decided we need one more track and got up "Only the dark". Stuart started to work on it. In the evening, dinner with Sam Taylor-Johnson.
Neil: So "Only the dark" wasn't done in Berlin.

January 27.

Went to Silver Lake and walked on the Historic Staircases walk.

Neil: It's an area of Los Angeles that has got staircases, and we saw where the famous Laurel and Hardy staircase was, where they carried a piano or something. I, of course, had never heard of it, is the fact of the matter.

January 28.

Worked with Stuart on "I don't wanna", "Only the dark", "Hoping for a miracle", "Monkey business", checking structures and adding vocals. Just before we were about to leave, Chris said he had a new track, "Do we want to?" and we got it up. Neil sang backing vocals on it.

Neil: "Do we want to?" turned into "Decision" then "Divide" and finally "Decide".

January 29.

Looked at videos for the Agenda tracks, then flew from LAX to Heathrow.

February 8.

Agenda goes online.

Chris: Why did we release *Agenda*?

I mean, what was it *à propos*?

Neil: We just decided it would be fun.

Chris: Oh, right. I thought there might have been something to hang it on.

February 18.

Flew to Berlin.

Chris: I hope no-one's totting up our carbon footprint, reading this.

February 19.

Started work on a track for the Billie Trix show, "Ich bin Musik". Chris wrote the track and Neil wrote the lyrics. Worked out structure and Neil sang a guide vocal.

February 20.

Carried on working on "Ich bin Musik". Neil sang new guide vocal. Carried on working on "Ich bin Musik" after lunch and put down a mix.

February 21.

Worked in the studio on a new Billie Trix song, "Soup". Chris had started writing the track the day before. "Soup" finished at around six o'clock. Chris started a new version of "For every moment" to use at the end of the Billie Trix show.



Stuart at Record Plant

Neil: “For every moment” is a song we wrote in 2003 when we were trying to write songs for the greatest hits album, *PopArt*, and it was originally planned to be a duet with Elton John.

Chris: He did hear it.

Neil: He didn’t like it. What he didn’t like was the fact that the verse and the chorus are the same chord change. Is that right?

Chris: I’m not sure. But one of the things we’ve always tried to do is have a verse and chorus over the same chords.

Neil: Anyway, then later on, in the period when we used to give our songs to Swedish group Alcazar, we gave it to them, because they reformed, having broken up. They loved it, but it never happened. We spent a long time in 2003 working on this song – there were three separate versions of it. I’ve always loved the chorus, and the sort of warmth of it, and it just occurred to me when we wanted a feel-good song at the end of *Musik* that this would work. We listened to the original demo and then Chris worked out a new backing track, and I sang it again.

February 22.

Worked all day on “For every moment.”

February 23.

Recorded a new string part and some lyric changes to “Ich bin Musik”, and some lyric changes to “Soup”.

Neil: Working on a Saturday again.

February 25.

Chris worked on a new version of “For every moment”. Neil sang vocals.

February 26.

Neil sang a few lyric changes on “For every

moment”. Chris sent it to Pete to mix.

Neil: The following day we went back to London.

March 4.

Meeting with Jonathan Harvey and Frances Barber. Frances read through the script and Neil played the songs from his phone at the appropriate places.

Neil: At that point the show was called *Mongrel*.

March 5.

Walked to the Farrow office to discuss the new album artwork, the Heinemann book reissues and the poster for the Billie Trix Edinburgh show.

March 6.

Looked at artwork for the Billie Trix show from Farrow. Jonathan said he was worried that Mongrel might be read as offensive and suggested Musik as an alternative. We decided to think about it.

March 7.

Spoke to Jonathan. Have decided to go with Musik as the title of the Billie Trix show.

April 5.

Flew from Tokyo to Los Angeles.

Neil: We have a very long day where we’re wandering around Tokyo and then we fly to LA and then we arrive in LA and check into our hotel. Walking back, I tripped over on the pavement and grazed my face.

April 8.

Went to Record Plant. Stuart was there with the assistant, Andrew Keller. Worked on “Will-o-the-wisp”, editing it a little, and then worked on “Happy people”, changing the order of the verses,



Mixing desk, Record Plant

adding backing vocals, putting down a mix. Then we went to Stuart's and had a barbeque.

Neil: Chris's very clever nickname for Andrew Keller was "Quelle heure est-il?"

April 9.

Went to the Record Plant. Worked with Stuart on "You are the one" then on "Hoping for a miracle" and then on "I don't wanna". Power cut at around 5.30 which brought everything to an end – talked by candle light for a while.

April 10.

Management meeting with Angela at the studio. Discussed putting the album release back to February. Decided to call the tour PopArt – the Greatest Hits live. Then listened to Stuart's mixes of "Monkey business" and "Only the dark". Stuart worked on mix of "An open mind".

April 11.

Worked for much of the day on "What have we done?". Stuart played bass on a couple of tracks. Neil wrote lyrics for the middle of "Hoping for a miracle".

April 12.

At Record Plant, worked on mix of "Will-o-the-wisp", "Dreamland", "Do we want to?", now renamed "Decision". At the end of the day we listened through to the whole album.

April 13.

Barbeque at Angela and Stuart's. Brandon texted us, asking us to perform with The Killers at Glastonbury.

Neil: The next day we went back to London.

April 16.

Meeting at Farrow about the new album artwork, and also about the Heinemann book reissues.

April 26.

Taxi to Sarm Music Village studio. Pete Gleadall already there. Chris arrived then Olly Alexander arrived. Olly sang new vocals on "Dreamland".

Neil: Olly thought his vocals could be better on "Dreamland" and he re-sang them. We didn't use all of them but we did use some of them.

May 10.

In Pet Shop Boys' London studio. Frances Barber arrived. Spent all day working out the right keys for her to sing the songs in Musik.

May 13.

Chris and Pete in the studio. Worked on Musik tracks in their new keys.

May 14.

Chris and Pete in the studio. Frances arrived and sang the vocals on "Soup". In the afternoon she sang "Mongrel". After Frances left, did some more work on "Soup", speeding up the track etc.

May 15.

In the studio. Frances sang vocals on "Ich bin Musik" and "For every moment".

May 16.

Frances sang vocals on "Friendly fire" and "Run girl run". In the afternoon, Frances re-sang "Ich bin Musik" in a softer voice. After Frances left, we worked with Pete on "Ich bin Musik" track.

May 17.

Listened through with Pete and finished all of the Billie Trix tracks. Went and had a meeting with Hanif Kureishi and Nikolai Foster from Leicester Curve Theatre to discuss us writing some music for a new stage production of My Beautiful Laundrette.

May 19.

Studio in London. Pete there. Frances arrived, and she sang and spoke new vocals on "For every moment" and then re-sang "Friendly fire". After she left, Pete and Neil edited a seven-inch version of "Ich bin Musik".

Neil: I can't remember now why we did that. We obviously thought it was necessary.

June 3.

In Berlin. Started working in the studio on the first track for My Beautiful Laundrette, "Omar's theme".

June 4.

Neil recorded a phone interview with Zoe Ball on Radio 2 to announce the Hyde Park show. We carried on working on "Omar's theme". Put down a mix of "Omar's theme" and sent it to Hanif Kureishi and Nikolai. Then added a vocoder part to the seven-inch mix of "Ich bin Musik" and sent it to Pete. Then wrote "Angelic thug" – Neil sang the vocals.

June 5.

Worked on "Angelic thug" track. Put down a mix of "Angelic thug" then did an instrumental of it with

trumpet playing the melody for "Johnny's theme". Put down a mix of "Johnny's theme".

June 6.

Nikolai, the director of My Beautiful Laundrette, asked us to do a "darker version" of "Johnny's theme", so we spent most of the day writing "Johnny's dark side". In the evening, put down a mix of "Johnny's dark side", and then started writing "London theme" based on a sample of the Bobby O version of "I get excited".

June 7.

Got up "Johnny's dark side", worked on it more, adding pad and extra brass parts. Then worked on "London theme" which became "Beautiful laundrette".

June 10.

Carried on working on "Beautiful laundrette", and put down a mix of it. Then we started working on "Night sings (Papa's theme)". Went out for tea. Came back to work more on "Night sings".

June 11.

Carried on working on "Night sings". Added a middle bit and put down a mix of it.

Neil: The next day we went back to London. By the way, you're thinking the album's finished, everyone. No, it's not. Will this album ever be finished...?

June 24.

Studio in London. With Pete and Frances we worked on the correct German lyrics for "Ich bin Musik". Then Pete and Neil discussed changes to mixes in My Beautiful Laundrette tracks.

Neil: We originally had *Ich bin Musik – Musik bin mich* and we were told that was wrong so we changed it to ... *Musik bin ich*. Which apparently still isn't correct, but it's acceptable.

Chris: Yeah, you know how we like broken English, where things are spoken slightly wrong? It seems like for the rest of the world – or, particularly Germany – it has to be exactly correct.

Neil: My theory for the reason for that is that German is not a world language. We are so used to hearing English mangled, we even sort of quite like it mangled.

Chris: It's funny – I don't see why it can't just be sort of charming and idiosyncratic.

Neil: Charming and idiosyncratic doesn't come into it. "It's wrong."

Chris: "It's wrong – it's a simple as that!"

Neil: "What's wrong with wrong?" is our point. And their point is: "A lot."

June 28.

Went to Cardiff and rehearsed at Cardiff Castle at The Killers' soundcheck.

Chris: The hottest soundcheck of all time.

June 29.

Went to Glastonbury and performed with The Killers.

Neil: And Johnny Marr, of course, is there.

Chris: That was fun, wasn't it?

Neil: That was fun, actually. The whole thing was fun.

July 5.

Neil went to Metropolis with Pete Gleadall and did mastering of Musik with Andy Baldwin. In the evening, Neil went to the new production of Closer to Heaven; Jonathan and Frances also there.

Chris: Our mastering person, Tim Young, has retired.

Neil: But he came out of retirement to master the album.

July 8.

Graffiti was cleared off the outside of the studio building. In the afternoon, worked on vocal version of "Omar's theme", "No boundaries". Neil wrote and sang the lyrics.

Neil: They said they wanted a song at the end of it. In fact Mr Chris Lowe suggested the title "No boundaries".

Chris: [deadpan] It's about cricket.

July 9.

Carried on working on "No boundaries", changed the structure a bit. Neil rewrote some of the lyrics and then sang them.

July 12.

Went to Farrow office to discuss artwork for the "Dreamland" single and to discuss using an old photograph from 2015 for the album artwork.

Neil: It's a photo of us reflected in a mirror.

July 15.

Went to Francis Barber's flat and had script read-through of Musik.

July 16.

Neil went to Pete Gleadall's studio and worked on the mix of "No boundaries", extending the choruses and adding the Neilatron.

Neil: The Neilatron is my voice sampled singing "ah"s.

July 17.

Neil went to Metropolis. Tim Young, the mastering engineer, came out of retirement and mastered Hotspot all day long.

Neil: We thought it was finished at this point. This is the version of *Hotspot* that includes "An open mind" as the penultimate track. It was when we all listened to it that we sort of wondered whether it was the right thing to do.

July 22.

First rehearsal for Musik.

July 23.

Went to Julius Gottlieb Gallery in the former Carmel College outside Wallingford for a photo session with Phil Fisk.

July 25.

Went to Farrow office and saw the "Dreamland" single artwork. Dinner with Angela.

July 26.

Production meeting for Musik. In the afternoon, Neil, Frances and Jonathan filmed interviews for the EPK of Musik. Neil went through the speaking sections of some of the songs Frances sings to get the timings right.

July 29.

RAK Studios in St Johns Wood with Stuart. Bumped into Noel Gallagher and had a chat with him. Stuart got up "Burning the heather". Went out for lunch then Neil sang some high chorus vocals. Bernard Butler arrived at three o'clock and played acoustic and electric guitars on the track. Stuart started to mix it.

July 30.

Went back to RAK. Stuart finishing the mix of "Burning the heather". When Chris arrived, worked on "Divide", which became "Decide". Went out for dinner with Stuart then went back to RAK. Left Stuart finishing the mix of "Decide".

July 31.

Went to see Closer to Heaven.

August 2.

Went to dress rehearsal of Musik. In the evening Pete Gleadall arrived, and also various friends of Frances's, including Ian McKellen, Simon Callow and Derek Jacobi. In all about eighty people watched a dress rehearsal of Musik.

Neil: It got a very good reaction which was rather exciting.

August 3.

Train to Edinburgh. Went to see venue with Frances Barber.

August 4.

Technical rehearsal in the venue. Photos taken for Edinburgh Evening News.

August 5.

Final technical rehearsal. In the evening, first preview of Musik which got a very good audience reaction. Drinks afterwards.

Neil: Jonathan Harvey, for his first night present for Frances, had bought a book by Yoko Ono which he'd written comments in, with a felt pen, in the character of Billie Trix. It was absolutely, indescribably funny. It was just fantastic.

August 6.

Still in Edinburgh. Went to see the second preview. Christopher Biggins came to see it.

Neil: We left the next day. It got good reviews.

August 14.

Neil went to Metropolis. Tim Young, coming out of retirement again, did new mastering for "No boundaries" then mastered "Burning the heather" and put it in the mastered album.

Neil: The album is now finished.

Chris: Wow.

August 23.

Neil returned to Edinburgh and saw Musik again. Drink afterwards with Ian McKellen and Murray.

Neil: It was fun, the whole thing in Edinburgh. The next night was the last night, and it got a standing ovation at the end.

September 2.

At Leicester Square Theatre, setting up the Musik show.

September 3.

Technical rehearsal and dress rehearsal then first London night. David Walliams and Gina Miller were there.

September 4.

Listened to Stuart's remix of "Dreamland". Went to Farrow office and, with Farrow, design

the tour poster for Dreamworld, then did the booklet artwork for Hotspot.

September 11.

Got up early to go to Radio 2 for a live interview on the Zoe Ball show, to announce the greatest hits tour and give "Dreamland" its first play. After, go to a studio in the West End to record voiceovers for radio adverts for the tour. Then went to rehearse with band.

Neil: We did the whole thing, doing the voiceovers, and only realised later that on every single one we'd called the tour *Dreamland* not *Dreamworld*.

Chris: A complete and utter waste of time.

Neil: So we went back to what they wanted in the first place – having some professional guy doing it.

Chris: Which was better, actually.

Neil: It was way better.

September 12.

Rehearsed, playing the Hyde Park set twice.

September 13.

Production rehearsals. Beverley Knight came. In the afternoon, full dress rehearsal.

September 14.

Afternoon soundcheck, then surprise gig at 229 Great Portland Street.

Neil: Which I've got to say was a lot of fun. It was so much fun.

September 15.

Radio 2 Hyde Park concert. Sat outside dressing room listening to Status Quo. Clean Bandit came and said hello. Olly Alexander arrived and we rehearsed "Dreamland" in the dressing room. Met a competition winner and had photos taken. Went onstage at 8.20. Drink backstage afterwards with David Walliams.

Neil: We were very lucky – a warm summer day. But it's been quite a busy year, really.

September 19.

Train to Leicester. Saw technical rehearsal of My Beautiful Laundrette and then the first dress rehearsal.

Neil: Joe Orton was from Leicester, and the next morning we were shown the Joe Orton archive at the University of Leicester. It was quite interesting. They were telling us about how they're trying to build a statue, get the funding for it. Then we went back to London. I think that really is it.

Chris: That's that.

Hotspot

WILL-O-THE-WISP

I see you after many years
on an elevated train
rattling above the streets of a city
where men don't wait in vain
I think, my, you may have changed
but you're such a handsome thing
Do you still hang around that old arcade
to see what luck will bring?

(Will-o-the-wisp)
The U1 is such a party train
(Will-o-the-wisp)
from Uhland to Warschauerstraße
(Will-o-the-wisp)
emerging from below past Nollendorfplatz
(Will-o-the-wisp)
in search of love and laughter
(Will-o-the-wisp)

You were always such a free spirit
A bright-eyed eager chap
A will-o-the-wisp
and charming with it
in your battered leather cap
(Will-o-the-wisp)

But maybe you've gone respectable
with a wife and job and all that
working for the local government
and living in a rented flat?

(Will-o-the-wisp)
The U1 is such a party train
(Will-o-the-wisp)
from Uhland to Warschauerstraße
(Will-o-the-wisp)
emerging from below past Nollendorfplatz
(Will-o-the-wisp)
in search of love and laughter
(Will-o-the-wisp)

And you my former will-o-the-wisp
Will you recognise me today?
Give me a smile for old time's sake
before you run away

(Will-o-the-wisp)
You were always such a free spirit
(Will-o-the-wisp)
Aren't you getting bored?
(Will-o-the-wisp)
A will-o-the-wisp
and charming with it
(Will-o-the-wisp)
who loved to be adored

(Will-o-the-wisp)
The U1 is such a party train
(Will-o-the-wisp)
from Uhland to Warschauerstraße
(Will-o-the-wisp)
emerging from below past Nollendorfplatz
(Will-o-the-wisp)
in search of love and laughter

(Will-o-the-wisp)
You were always such a free spirit
(Will-o-the-wisp)
who came and went so much
(Will-o-the-wisp)
A will-o-the-wisp
and charming with it
I'm still longing for your touch
(Will-o-the-wisp)

Chris: I wrote a piece of music, started at 12.17 in the morning on Friday, the 2nd of February, 2018.

Neil: After midnight?

Chris: I like to work at night. Neil's an early bird, I'm a late person. The name I gave to the track was "Dad dancing". That was because I'd been to see Pete Tong's Heritage Orchestra at the 02. I was thinking of a riff that would be good for an orchestra to play to a dance beat, but I was also picturing how the men of a certain age at this concert danced, sort of moving from side to side. Quite endearing, really.

Neil: I think that's a London dance as well.

Chris: It's certainly men of a certain age dancing to house music from back in the day.

Neil: I think the album process started with Chris downloading a load of stuff from his personal computer onto the Berlin computer – this was one of the first ones we worked on specifically for this album.

Chris: It became "Will-o-the-wisp" in the studio on February 23.

Neil: We started working on it one evening – we'd been out somewhere and I'd been drinking. On the lead vocal I could hear that in my voice and I quite like that sound. I started writing the lyrics then. I'd had the idea of calling a song "Will-o-the-wisp" – a will o' the wisp comes from folklore; it's a creature that seems to appear at dusk, and really it's a trick of the light – and I also had an idea from something someone said to us, and that I think Chris then repeated. The U-bahn line, the U1, which we get sometimes in Berlin, goes from Uhlandstrasse in the West, on the Ku'damm, to Warschauer Strasse, in the East, and someone had said to us: "It's a real party train, because you go from the shopping district to an area around Warschauer Strasse where there are clubs and the Astra Kulturhaus." The train starts underground but then a little bit later it starts to go overground, and people start to get on with bottles of beer. There was also something I'd read about Christopher Isherwood, the English writer who I think is one of the people, in British minds, that created the idea of Berlin from his Berlin novels, later made into the musical *Cabaret*. He had affairs with various young Germans in the early 1930s, and then he made a return visit to Berlin in the early '50s, after the war, when he caught up with one of those former lovers. So in this song, for some reason I imagined Christopher Isherwood sitting on the U-bahn: he looks down the carriage and sees one of his former lovers. And the song is his internal dialogue about that person – completely imagined and not based on fact, aside from that I know he met one of them. I liked the idea that, in my story, the man that the Christopher Isherwood character is looking at has been in his life and then just vanished, like a will o' the wisp. And then suddenly is rematerialised, like a will o' the wisp, but is about to vanish again. So he says "give me a smile for old time's sake". I put all of that in the contemporary era: the party train and all the rest of it. So the album opens with us on the U-bahn in Berlin.

Chris: With sound effects.

Neil: In the middle of the song we arrive at Hallesches Tor, which is where Chris and I get off the train to go to Kreuzberg where we get our hair cut sometimes – what little hair we have. When we sent all the demos to Stuart and he made his first list of songs he thought we should have on the album, to my surprise this wasn't on it. Then when we started to work on the album I said, "I really think we should think about 'Will-o-the-wisp' because I've always imagined it being the opening track on the album – just getting on the train and the whole thing, it seems to me like a really good start – it sets up the Berlin thing." He said, "Yeah, okay," and we started working on it. Stuart actually recorded the U-bahn. We all went together – we got on at Uhlandstrasse... unfortunately we didn't get to Warschauer Strasse because the line was shut at Hallesches Tor and we had to transfer to a replacement bus service. "Will-o-the-wisp" is normally spelled "Will o' the wisp", by the way, but I just don't like it, typographically. I think it looks whimsical.

Chris: I'm quite shocked by that. Is this the first time this has happened – that punctuation's just gone out the window?

Neil: Well, I've *decided* to call it "Will-o-the-wisp", so it's my creative decision to spell it like that. Because I think it looks better. And actually, weirdly, the "o" with an apostrophe sort of gives me the creeps, even.

Chris: Oh, it's a phobia!

Neil: Yes, I don't like it. It's like if you read the poetry of Rudyard Kipling, he famously tried to write in colloquial cockney private soldier accents, and, again, the look of that has always given me the creeps. But I love the phrase "will o' the wisp".

YOU ARE THE ONE

You are the one I want
The one
You are the one I want
The one

Driving down to Zehlendorf
Lie by the lake
on a summer afternoon
Laughing at some mistranslation
Order coffee and cake
then take the train
back into Mitte to see a film
about love and liberation
And after round the corner to a bar you know
where you like to go

You are the one I want
The one
You are the one I want
The one
Winter, spring and summer, autumn
always in my heart
Live like this forever
and we'll never be apart

It's like a drug
It's like a dream
A European film
we should have seen
I can feel the sunshine warmer
And every bird in the sky's a performer
A tingle-tangle
chittering and chattering
By the fountain
spluttering and splattering
On and on into the summer night
then taking flight

You are the one
You are the one

You are the one I want
The one
You are the one I want
The one
Winter, spring and summer, autumn
always in my heart
Live like this forever
and we'll never be apart
You are the one I want
The one
You are the one I want
The one

Neil: An old track. It was written for *Super*. It was one of two very poppy songs we decided not to put on *Super*.

Chris: Originally on the computer when it first appears – on Monday January 12, 2015 at 16.16 – it was just called “The one”.

Neil: I thought of *you are the one* walking down the street, and put it on my phone. Initially the lyric just went *you are the one, you are the one*. Then Chris wrote the verse chords and melody, and then I wrote the lyrics to Chris's melody. I also had *winter, spring and summer, autumn, always in my heart* on my phone and I was very worried that I'd stolen that from another song, including the lyric. I searched around – I thought it might be some mid-'80s pop song. But it wasn't at all. I think the whole vocal was sung when we wrote it in Berlin – I don't remember singing it again.

Chris: The demo was very different – it was like a dance record.

Neil: We'll probably release the demo at some point.

Chris: When we were in Hansa we decided it just wasn't working as a dance record, and we decided to slow it down. I suggested it should be a ballad.

Neil: In the middle section, because of the line a *European film we should have seen*, we had a sample from the film by Fellini, *8½*. I thought it should be something Italian and I found this scene from *8½* on YouTube – it sounded really romantic and the track sounds very romantic. People are talking in Italian and then there's an English character who says “pleased to meet you”. It sounded really good. But it took ages to get through to the people who owned the Fellini film, and eventually in the summer of 2019 we weren't given permission. Then I suggested we put in a sample from the film *Call Me By Your Name*: the young guy asks the older guy, “Are you pleased I came?” and then the older guy says, “I'd kiss you right now if I could.” So we asked for permission for that. The *Call Me By Your Name* people eventually came back and said, “Yes, you can use it,” but it was too late by then – the deadline for the album had passed. So we actually edited a little bit out of the middle section, and it went out without any film sample. The Fellini sample was really, really good – I kind of miss it.

Chris: Only we will hear it.

Neil: Unfortunately. Anyway, the lyrics to the song are about a Sunday afternoon in Berlin. There are over 80 lakes, or something like that, around Berlin, and Zehlendorf is an area which has got a lake, or lakes. The song is about going to the lakes and then going back into the city in the afternoon and going to see a film. It's a bit like “Perfect Day” by Lou Reed. There's a sense that it's such a perfect day that the one I want in the song is in fact Berlin. I've had some very lovely summer days there in Berlin, in a way that you can't have in London in quite the same way, because Berlin has forests and lakes within its borders, so you can be in a gritty cityscape and then suddenly in these very bucolic surroundings. Once it became a ballad it really made sense.

HAPPY PEOPLE

Happy people
living in a sad world
Happy people
living in a sad world

Everyone comes from somewhere
I leave and you arrive
I watch you on the staircase
taking two steps at a time
I wonder if you need me
I think I'm gonna cry
The outside world demands me
and I have to say goodbye

Happy people
Living in a sad world
Happy people
Living in a sad world

All the pomp and circumstance
can't drag me away from this
A simple suburban love affair
where you fight and then you kiss
(Do you call me a fool?)
The feeling of epic grandeur
at the end of a summer's day
The sense of so much missing
when the world gets in the way

Happy people
living in a sad world
Happy people
living in a sad world

People, happy people
People, happy people

No one comes from nowhere
I leave and you arrive
It's the rhythm of our history
It's the beat behind our lives
(Do you call me a fool?)
A blues would be in B flat
pain defining wisdom
but the soul is in the high hat
programmed in the system

Happy people
living in a sad world
Happy people
living in a sad world

Chris: On Tuesday, March 21, 2017, at 12.24 I recorded something called "House piano". That's the song's middle bit, so the middle bit was written first. Then a year later we worked on it in Berlin.

Neil: There was a Latino thing at the beginning, and in the part that became the middle bit I originally sang *issues – you've got issues*. Chris wrote all the music. The *happy people* refrain I'd sang into my phone walking down the street, sung quite slowly. I emailed it to the studio computer, Chris put it in the track and the melody really worked with the chords, without changing the key or anything. It just fitted with it. And then I re-sang it. Having done that, I thought of doing a spoken word verse. Then, later, when we were recording it in Hansa studios I took the gaps out in the spoken word part so that there were twice as many lyrics. Before it was *everyone comes from somewhere*, and then a gap and then *I leave and you arrive*, and that became, over the same length of music, *everyone comes from somewhere, I leave and you arrive, I watch you on a staircase, taking two steps at a time*, taking out all the gaps. So I needed more words. But it's one of those tracks that didn't have much work done on it, to be honest. It remained true to its "House piano" origins.

Chris: Is it about people being happy?

Neil: It's about people being happy at home... I imagine it being a family, hence *I watch you on a staircase, taking two steps at a time*. I assume it's a guy looking at his child. And then he gets dragged away by the pressures of career, work, politics...

Chris: ... rolling news...

Neil: Yes, exactly. And at one point I made the first verse the third verse, but then I changed them back again. So there was a period where it started with the verse that goes *a blues would be in B flat*...

Chris: And then my favourite line on the album: *but the soul is in the high hat*. Now that would make a very good techno record.

Neil: I've had that line sitting around for years. Maybe even decades: *the soul is in the high hat*. I thought it sounded like just what Chris said, an amazing Frankie Knuckles-type of house record. And now it's ended up as a line in this. But it's been around for forever. I think here it's meant to be kind of metaphorical: *the soul is in the high hat, programmed in the system*. The soul is there but it is programmed in a system which is reducing its spontaneity. So it is like the happy people living in a sad world.

Chris: It's interesting, because in another of our songs ["Absolutely fabulous"] it's *dull soulless dance music*.

Neil: Though, to be fair, that's not our line.

Chris: Did we not ask them to say that?

Neil: No, she did that.

Chris: How wrong could they be? Do they not know how much soul is in a high hat?

DREAMLAND

I heard there's a dreamland
in another world far away
They say it's a free land
and they welcome everyone to stay
You got to take me
You got to make me
remember how to dream today
I'm so tired of my homeland
when I fall asleep you lead the way

Dreamland
I love you
I dream of you all night and day
Dreamland
I need you
I close my eyes and you lead the way

We're falling for pleasure
in a garden where the sun still shines
and staying forever
leaving all our worries behind
It's a kind of amnesia
where all problems seem to disappear
And you don't need a visa
You can come and go and still be here

Dreamland
I love you
I dream of you all night and day
Dreamland
I need you
I close my eyes and you lead the way

Dreamland
is a free land
Kiss me, hold me, take my hand
Sleep is a river
that leads us to a better land

I don't wanna wake up
I don't wanna wake up

Dreamland
is a free land
Kiss me, hold me, take my hand
Sleep is a river
that leads us to a better land

Dreamland
I love you
I dream of you all night and day
Dreamland
I need you
I close my eyes and you lead the way

Words and music: Alexander/Lowe/Tennant

Neil: When Olly Alexander from Years & Years came round to our studio in February 2017, we sat down, had a cup of coffee, and we said, "What have you been doing?" And the day before he'd been to Dreamland in Margate, a funfair, which I personally had never heard of though apparently it's quite famous, and I said, "Oh, that's a good title for a song." Chris got up this track he'd written quite recently.

Chris: I just write, just for the pure enjoyment of writing music. It's my only way of expressing myself – I can't do it through words. This was originally called "Anno Domini", and I'd started it at 22.58 on January 23, 2017.

Neil: The evening, again.

Chris: I like to work until the early hours. I was the same at university. I was used to working right the way through the night.

Neil: I can't do that. Anyway, Chris started playing this track to me and Olly, and we started singing.

Chris: The chorus was originally the outro.

Neil: That was the best bit of the song so we made that the chorus. Then Olly changed the melody of the chorus – the *I love you* part, he did that. I had the idea of it being about refugees – there was a lot going on in the news at the time. I basically wrote the verse, but Olly put some lyrics in. *I'm so tired of my homeland* – that's Olly's line. We didn't have a middle bit yet so Chris wrote the middle bit, which is now my favourite bit of the song. We worked at it for two days and the whole song was done.

Chris: There was a lot of chat, and a lot of coffee. Flat whites – well, for me.

Neil: What Olly brought to the process was, he's a fantastic singer and he's obviously got a very different melodic style.

Chris: He sings in a more soulful way.

Neil: He made the melody lines more interesting, and changed them.

Chris: The whole process was a lot of fun. A lot of fun and laughter.

Neil: Then when the other two members of Years & Years heard it, the keyboard player said, "It sounds like 'It's Raining Men'."

Chris: I remember taking the demo back after we'd done it and dancing around the kitchen, thinking, "God, what a great song this is – the sort of music I like!"

Neil: Then a lot of time passed and I texted Olly, saying "Are you using that track for your album?" and he said, "No, it didn't really fit on it."

Chris: Wasn't their album quite conceptual?

Neil: Yes. So I said, "Maybe we'll put it on our album," and Olly was very enthusiastic about that. Closer to making our album I again texted and said, "Are you alright about that?" and he said, "Yeah, as long as I can sing it again." Meanwhile we worked on it with Stuart. We didn't do much, because the demo was very good, though Stuart added a keyboard part. But originally Olly had sung the whole song because it was written to be a Years & Years record, and now we decided to split it up as a duet. I recorded my parts and then we decided

to take it down a tone, because I thought I'd never be able to sing it live. So I sang the whole thing again in a tone lower, then we decided that we didn't like it in that key. It wasn't as good. So we went back to the original key. But in fact some of my vocal on the finished record is my vocal sung a tone lower then pitched up to the original tone. Then Olly came in and sang it again – we used some of his original vocal and some of his new vocal. To me, it always sounded like a single. And I think Stuart thought that as well. Partly because it was a collaboration, but really it was the song being really catchy.

Chris: We were all thrilled when we finished the demo.

Neil: I thought we'd written a very solid pop song that was a lot of fun but still had an underlying seriousness to it. Also it's got a very "me" line: *you can come and go and still be here*. I love that line, because it's completely meaningless, but I sort of know what it means.

Chris: It's very enigmatic.

Neil: Isn't it?

Chris: What does it mean, though?

Neil: I don't know. It sounds good, though.

Chris: People will be writing university dissertations on that.

HOPING FOR A MIRACLE

It's been this way
since life began
The child lives on
inside the man
You have to eat
You need to sleep
You sometimes feel
you're in too deep

On Waterloo Bridge
you got lost in the fog
performing a crazy monologue
about love and luck
and do they coincide?
And how you can feel disqualified
with no room for manoeuvre
and all routes explored
because you're ignored

You're hoping for a miracle
to get you out of here
Hoping for a miracle
A miraculous career
Where everyone loves you
everyone wants you
a photo on their phone
You're on the rebound
Life is a playground
A taxi takes you home
You're hoping for a miracle
Still hoping for a miracle
with no room for manoeuvre
No room for manoeuvre

A meadow in Oxford
where you sat in the sun
Those were the days
you had just begun
firing verbal shots
like a Tommy Gun
In the expectation
you'd be number one
A child of the sun
A leader of men
You know, not if but when

You're hoping for a miracle
to run and win the race
Hoping for a miracle
to earn a famous face
Everyone loves you
Everyone needs you
You've got what it takes
You're everywhere now
You have the know-how
and all the money it makes
Hoping for a miracle
Still hoping for a miracle
with no thought of surrender
No thought of surrender

No thought of surrender
No room for manoeuvre
Hello, hello
Is anybody out there?
You need a break
You could take it from anywhere
Could they beam you out of here?

Hoping for a miracle
Been waiting too long
You're hoping for a miracle
to help you carry on
When nobody loves you
nobody needs you
You're out here on your own
Who can you turn to?
Where can you run to?
There's nowhere you call home
You're hoping for a miracle
still hoping for a miracle
with no room for manoeuvre
No room for manoeuvre

It's been this way
since life began
The child lives on
inside the man
You have to eat
You need to sleep
You sometimes feel
you're in too deep

Neil: Might be my favourite track on the album.

Chris: It started off as a piano riff I wrote on holiday in France, "Le Touquet" – it was on the 18th of June, 2018, at 12.32 in the afternoon – and then I worked on it more when I came back to London.

Neil: The melody I sing is based very heavily on Chris's melody line. I had some words lying around...

Chris: Neil normally has words lying around.

Neil: ... but I think I wrote most of it specifically for this. I had some lyrics about a homeless man that are in the first verse. I actually was on Waterloo Bridge and there was a man giving a crazy monologue, or something like that, and I'd written down a few lines about it in my phone. Without being too pretentious, the first line, "On Waterloo bridge you got lost in the fog", sort of refers to *The Waste Land* by T.S. Eliot.

Chris: It's a good job T.S. Eliot wrote that, isn't it? There'd be no Pet Shop Boys without that.

Neil: There's also a film called *Waterloo Bridge*, made in the 1940s, that I really like. [checking] In *The Waste Land* it's actually London Bridge – *Unreal city/Under the brown fog of a winter dawn/A crowd flowed over London Bridge* – but I was certainly thinking of *The Waste Land*. Crossing the river – it may actually have been the bridge that goes to Charing Cross – I saw a man sitting there and he was ranting, and that was, for me, the starting point.

Chris: Was he hoping for a miracle?

Neil: Yes, exactly. In the song, it's someone who started off life assuming they would be successful. So you start off in the present, there's the man at Waterloo Bridge. The second verse, he's super-confident, but it hasn't worked out. Part of this also belongs in my file of songs referring to Tony Blair – it's a separate meaning for the song, really. Tony Blair is hoping for a miracle that people will stop thinking about the Iraq war and will concentrate instead on his achievements. So the song is looking at someone and how it hasn't worked out for them, and how they're hoping for a miracle to get them out of here. Someone who's life has fallen apart, hoping that a miracle will pull it all together. But I don't think that will happen. There's also a little rap thing in it which I had lying around and which fitted the rhythm of it. We have a song called "Children" or "Former children", which is about how we're all former children and it was part of that, but I thought it fitted with the rhythm here. Then, when we came to LA I said: the problem with this song is it just goes round and round, it needs a middle bit. I kept thinking it should go somewhere, and so I put in a chord change. It was originally 16 bars but then we halved it.

Chris: That was more than enough.

Neil: I think it's quite a moving song, really. As soon as Chris played me the original chord change I loved it. I think it sounds quite Euro – I always think that chord change could have been from a Giorgio Moroder film soundtrack in approximately 1982. Even the synth it was played on has that kind of quality. I think it's got a lot of feeling, and there's one vocal I really like – *there's nowhere you call home* – where Chris said, "Oooh, you're doing a Dusty."

I DON'T WANNA

I don't wanna go out
I don't wanna go dancing

Lonely boy
He has his head in the clouds
Sits at home
with no one around
Feels so shy
he'd rather sit alone and cry
that no one understands this guy

I don't wanna go out
I don't wanna go dancing
I don't wanna go out
I don't wanna go dancing

Friday night you'd hope
the phone might just ring
but when it does
he says he's not in
What's the deal?
A guy so shy
he doesn't feel
that he has any sex appeal

I don't wanna go out
I don't wanna go dancing
I don't wanna go out
I don't wanna go dancing
I don't wanna
I don't wanna

In a song he hears
that rhythm's a dancer
and it won't
take no for an answer
Suddenly
he thinks he might reluctantly
go looking for some company
He summons up the energy

I don't wanna go out
I don't wanna go dancing
I don't wanna go out
I don't wanna go dancing
I don't wanna
I don't wanna

Chris: I really liked that song by Tracey Thorn, "Dancefloor". I went home inspired by that piece of music and wrote a piece of music called "Rewind".

Neil: The funny thing about that Tracey Thorn song is that "Dancefloor" was inspired by our song "Vocal".

Chris: So there you go – it just goes round in circles. This was started on the 3rd of March, 2018, at 21.36. And the first version is literally just four chords.

Neil: And then you thought, "Right I'm going to bed."

Chris: "I'm going to bed now. Job done!" Then the next day I added tons of stuff. It's pretty much how it starts now. It's inspired by the Tracey Thorn song but one of the joys of being inspired by something was that if you're not very good at doing something you end up with something completely different.

Neil: "Blue Monday" and "You Make Me Feel Mighty Real".

Chris: Then on the 20th of March it became "I don't wanna". Or "I don't want to". Because actually I find "wanna" makes my flesh crawl a bit. Like how some people have a problem with "will o' the wisp".

Neil: As the song itself is a song about how listening to a pop song inspires someone, I think it needs to be "wanna". "Wanna" is very American pop. Chris got the track up and I came up with "I don't wanna go dancing". I can reveal that I am at this point, in the chorus only, pretending to be Madonna. That's been a long-term songwriting strategy that's still paying off: "What would Madonna do?" That's why I sing it in an American accent. In fact, it's really a Brooklyn accent. Chris had written the vocal melody and I'd had to fit the words to the melody, which is always quite a tricky thing to do. The lyric originally went *I don't wanna go out, I don't wanna go dancing, I don't wanna stay in, I don't feel like relaxing*, but obviously very shortly after that I realised that was indescribably lame and decided that it was just better to repeat the first line. It became a story about a boy who feels too ugly and unsexy to want to go out, and so he stays in his room, being miserable. There was a long debate about the person it's being sung in, and in fact it's sung in three different persons. The chorus is sung from the perspective of the boy: *I don't wanna go out, I don't wanna go dancing* is what the boy's saying. Really it should be in quote marks. Then the narrator takes over: *Lonely boy, he has his head in the clouds...* But then the second verse is in the second person: *Friday night, you'd hope the phone might just ring....*, instead of *he hopes....* My perspective on this is that at this point the narrator is talking directly to his audience. And then you return to the third person, and then again to the first person in the chorus. Then in the last verse he hears the song "Rhythm Is A Dancer" by Snap! and decides he will go out. I nearly changed the last chorus to something that said he was going to go out but it just sounded too contrived.

Chris: Tracey Thorn quotes song titles in her song, amazingly enough. So without us even knowing, it does kind of go back to that.

Neil: That's true. What I like about this song is the combination of *I don't wanna go out* and the synth counter melody. I think it's really funky, actually.

MONKEY BUSINESS

I'm looking for monkey business
Just playing around
I'm here on monkey business
and look what I found

Everybody get on board
I'm back in town
and I'm not leaving
'til the last joint has shut down
People tell me I'm a legend
round these parts
I start the party
and I end up breaking hearts

Bring me margaritas
champagne and red wine
We're gonna have a party
where we all cross the line

I'm looking for monkey business
Just playing around
I'm here on monkey business
and look what I found

I'm not dealing with the real world
anymore
Been there, done that, came back
and I know the score

Flew in from the city
Just got into town
Checked into a new place
I can't seem to settle down

I'm looking for monkey business
Just playing around
I'm here on monkey business
and look what I found

I'm here on funky business
Just playing around
I'm here on funky business
Look what I found

There are diamonds in the sky
that shine for me
Gonna pick them one by one
I guarantee

I'm looking for monkey business
Just playing around
I'm here on monkey business
Look what I found
Just playing around

Hanging from the rafters
I'm a chimpanzee
What I do for afters
you'll just have to wait and see

I'm looking for monkey business
Just playing around

Bring me margaritas
champagne and red wine
We're gonna to have a party
where we all cross the line

I'm looking for monkey business
Just playing around
I'm here on monkey business
and look what I found

Entered by the back door
Straight into the bar
Checking out the dance floor
Well I like who you are

I'm looking for monkey business
Just playing around

Neil: "Monkey business" has been around for several years. We wrote this in Berlin in 2014. It was written for *Super*.

Chris: When we started, we weren't happy with it.

Neil: Then it went in a bundle of songs to Stuart for this album and he really liked it and he said, "No, this could be worked out really easily." In the intervening years, I'd come up with another part of the song, the bit I think of as being like The Rolling Stones or Mick Jagger, the second half of the chorus, and so we put the chords for that in. But Stuart did the groove, and then Stuart put in this sort of middle break with the vocoder. Stuart gets a songwriting credit on this.

Chris: Stuart really did loads on this – he added disco strings, vocoders. He just made this record groove. It was the final day of working at Hansa.

Neil: Suddenly we just had it, in a very short space of time – my recollection is that in two or three hours it was suddenly totally great.

Chris: I think the thing that transformed this track was Stuart putting real bass on it.

Neil: It started to groove. Chris and I hadn't been that keen on working on it and Stuart sort of said, "See?"

Chris: At the end you suddenly get some extra house piano. And as I was playing it Stuart videoed it on his phone. So that could go viral at any moment.

Neil: The idea for the lyric came from when we were in Austin, Texas on tour. We went out for lunch and were walking back to the hotel down a back street, and a man recognised us. He was sort of a businessman type, and he

went, "Hey, are you guys the Pet Shop Boys?" I was quite surprised he recognised us. He said, "What are you doing here?" I said, "We're playing a gig tonight – what are you doing here?" And he said: "Oh, me? I'm looking for monkey business. Just playing around." He was there to have fun, and Austin, Texas, is a pretty monkey business-ish kind of place, actually. It's got lots of bars and all the rest of it. I thought, "Wow, that's a good line for a song", and I wrote it down almost immediately. The person singing the song is still based on the man in Austin, Texas. He could really be an Alan Partridge character, because he's very full of himself: "People tell me I'm a legend round these parts, I start the party and I end up breaking hearts". I think you sort of think: Really? *Really?* "Hanging from the rafters, I'm a chimpanzee" – he thinks he's a professional party-goer who really makes the party swing. Whether that is really the case is a different issue, but he's got a very high opinion of himself and his pulling power and how he looks and everything. It's definitely not me. It's not Neil Tennant.

Chris: I would never have thought it was going to end up this good.

Neil: I do think it's the most danceable record we've ever made, to be honest. To me it's like a wedding disco record. I mean, it makes *me* want to dance. And "It's a sin" didn't do that.

Chris: It's amazing how some songs that aren't really much of a thing at all...

Neil: I think that's the thing we've always been worst at – making a slight song really good.

Chris: I never thought it was even going to be an album track. And now it's ended up one of the best tracks on the album.

Neil: We've actually written, almost for the first time, a groove song. Someone at Kobalt called it "the new 'Get Lucky'". That'd be nice, wouldn't it?

ONLY THE DARK

Shadows start to fall
bringing on the night
We're sitting in the dark
Let's not turn on the light
It feels so good to be
just the two of us
Anyone else around
would be superfluous

Although the dark
is leaving its mark
it's not gonna last
so let's enjoy the night
until it gets light
It happens so fast

Don't be scared
for only the dark
can show you the stars
I'll be there
the moment the dark
reopens your heart

It's time to make a fire
play some music low
I'm right here next to you
with nowhere else to go

You're all I want
It's all that I need
to be here with you
And so let's hold on to this
together we're safe
whatever we do

Don't be scared
for only the dark
can show you the stars
I'll be there
the moment the dark
reopens your heart

Suddenly the day is shining
and what was all a dream is what it seems
I don't think you need reminding
we both know what it means to be alive

Although the dark
is leaving its mark
it's not gonna stay
Always the light
will break through the night
and bring on the day

Don't be scared
for only the dark
can show you the stars
I'll be there
the moment the dark
reopens your heart

Neil: "Only the dark" wasn't going to be on the album originally. When we regrouped in LA we realised that we needed another song. But I've always liked this song. I think this was the first track we wrote in Berlin when we started writing songs for the album in November 2017.

Chris: The track was originally called "Distraught". I must have been feeling distraught at the time. It was started on Tuesday the 24th of January, 2017, at 19.13.

Neil: It's so '80s.

Chris: It's easy-listening.

Neil: It reminds me a bit of "Drive" by The Cars.

Chris: And it does sound like you're driving in a limo in LA, doesn't it? From the airport to the Mondrian.

Neil: It sounds unbelievably '80s, this track, in a good way. Like it's from a film soundtrack.

Chris: We started working on it in Berlin on Tuesday the 21st of November at 16.19.

Neil: Teatime!

Chris: So we must have either just had a cup of tea...

Neil: ... or just made one.

Chris: We don't always go out for tea, we sometimes have it in. With a Bounty. There's a shop round the corner from us that sells the dark Bounty.

Neil: We started with Chris's backing track, and that suggested to me this rather jazzy modulation into the chorus that I played on the piano in the studio. I kept thinking it sounded like Peabo Bryson, or from the soundtrack of *Labyrinth* – I imagine people in slow motion in '80s clothes. And there's also my favourite bit of the song: the bell line. That's what makes this song, I think. But there isn't too much to say about it really.

Chris: It just is what it is.

Neil: It's an all-purpose romantic song about two people on a sofa. I think the person singing the song is potentially seducing the other person on the sofa, but it's a couple in love. Dusk descends, and they don't turn the light on. The lyric's a bit corny, to be honest, but there's a line I like in it: *anyone else around would be superfluous*. I quite like that.

BURNING THE HEATHER

You've got me all wrong
I'm not that guy
I'm just the singer of the song
in my mind's eye
If I thought what you think
I wouldn't even be here
I've just dropped in for a drink
before I disappear

You've got me all wrong
I'm not on your grapevine
When I came along
you were just in my eye-line
I'm not one to stare
I'm not that committed
but I'm always aware
of what isn't permitted

Autumn is here
and they're burning the heather
Sheepdogs are running
hell for leather
Seasons are changing
Time's moving along
Give me a drink
and I'll be gone

You've got me all wrong
There's no one I'm missing
I'm quite happy to be alone
There are no lips I'm kissing
The truth must be the truth
unvarnished in its telling
otherwise it's just hype you hope
people won't notice you're peddling

Autumn is here
and they're burning the heather
Sheepdogs are running
hell for leather
Seasons are changing
Time's moving along
Give me a drink
and I'll be gone

Where did I come from?
Where do I go?
Time is so heartless
You don't want to know
I set out in the dark
waking from a nightmare
hoping I could find
the middle of nowhere
I'm a stranger in this town
but that's as far as it goes
and where I am bound
no one knows

Autumn is here
and they're burning the heather
Sheepdogs are running
hell for leather
Seasons are changing
Time's moving along
Give me a drink
and I'll be gone

You've got me all wrong
That's what I'm sensing
I'm not one of those bread-heads
always pounds, shillings and pence-ing
There's a few things I need
but I've money for paying
and if you've enough room
I'll consider staying

Neil: This started as an entire lyric I wrote, *You've got me all wrong*, one of several other lyrics that I gave to Chris at the beginning of 2018, thinking, "Well, he might write some music to them, you never know..."

Chris: "... that lazy..."

Neil: "... he's got nothing better to do..."

Chris: It is true. I haven't got anything better to do.

Neil: And, delightfully, he did.

Chris: I just went for the ones that were instant for me. I don't know what I do. [laughs] I just look at the lyrics and put some notes to it. It's not difficult.

Neil: It's like Elton doesn't think about what the lyric means either.

Chris: Well, I can tell, *You've got me all wrong*... it's not going to be a happy number, is it?

Neil: For some reason I'd thought "You got me all wrong" should be the title, but later it became blatantly obvious that it should be "Burning the heather".

Chris: On Saturday the 20th of January 2018 at 19.07, I had my very first stab at it.

Neil: As soon as I heard his melody I thought it was brilliant. It's heartbreaking.

Chris: I was also doing jazz. I was just thinking: Why not? You're only middle-aged once.

Neil: It has this very unusual melody for us – it sounds like the '60s to me. I can imagine Gerry And The Pacemakers singing it. The chorus melody, it's not like one of our tunes, really. It's almost folk. It's what we used to call at *Smash Hits* "a scarf-waver".

Chris: Yes, it's a scarf-waver.

Neil: It always sounded great, but I thought it needed a middle bit.

Chris: Apple Logic has these fantastic guitar loops – well, they're not really loops, they'll play the chords so you can get a very convincing guitar part. Though then we got Bernard Butler in.

Neil: We've been waiting for an opportunity to do something with him.

Chris: It's quite sad, isn't it, that song?

Neil: Oh, it's very sad. It's about loneliness, really, I think. It's a very northern song – it doesn't fit Berlin, really, at all. I used to have a house in County Durham, where we used to record, which I've now sold, but one day I was driving across the moors, probably to Barnard Castle, and it was autumn and they were burning the heather, and I thought: "autumn is here and they're burning the heather, sheepdogs are running hell for leather". My father used to say "hell for leather". I probably actually pulled the car over, wrote it on my phone, and carried on.

Chris: Well, I'm glad you did.

Neil: I thought: that's a really good lyric. And I liked the sort of metaphorical concept it opened, that in someone's life they were burning the heather. You burn the heather to stimulate growth, and also I think to get rid of vermin. You're destroying to create. So then I came up with a story to go with it, a bit like a Bob Dylan song, and it's very much set in Weardale in County Durham. It's about a stranger coming into a village somewhere and he's quite full of himself, and he's evidently quite a troubled person. He's searching for something. And he ends up saying that if they've got a room, he'll stay. He goes into a pub in a little village, and there's a woman behind the bar, and he's telling her stories she doesn't believe and she thinks he's basically a bullshitter. He's saying "you've got me all wrong... I'm not that guy", trying to put up a façade of bravado, where he says he's not lonely and all the rest of it, but you realise at the end when he makes his plea to stay that actually he was a bullshitter, she was totally right, he was chatting her up. He's saying, if you've got a spare room, I'd love to stay the night. And he might even start a new life there. After all, it is followed by a wedding.

WEDDING IN BERLIN

We're getting married
We're getting married, married, married

We're getting married
because we love each other
We're getting married today
We're getting married
because the time feels right
We're doing it without delay

We're getting married
a lot of people do it
Don't matter if they're straight or gay
We're getting married
because we love each other
We're getting married today

We're getting married, married, married
We're getting married, married, married

We're getting married
because we love each other
We're getting married today
We're getting married
because the time feels right
We're doing it without delay

We're getting married, married, married
We're getting married, married, married

We'll be together
always, forever
We're getting married today

Neil: This was first written for a wedding in Berlin. A friend of ours, an artist called Thilo Heinzmann, who we have two paintings by, was getting married, and we couldn't go to his wedding, so we decided that as a wedding present we would write a piece of music for his wedding. Chris decided to use Mendelssohn's "The Wedding March".

Chris: I downloaded the sheet music and played it into the computer.

Neil: And there is an area of Berlin called Wedding, which is pronounced with a "v", so it's also sort of a pun. Actually this version was even longer than the one on the record because it's got a verse that you don't get on the record about two happy people walking down the aisle, which mentioned Thilo and his wife Aisha. A friend of ours was at the wedding reception, and they ended up playing it three times, everyone going berserk and singing along with it. We didn't really think we'd be recording it, but it was in the package of songs that Stuart got, and Stuart immediately liked it.

Chris: I didn't think it'd be on the album.

Neil: This was very much one Stuart wanted to be on the album. But then it did fit in. The original wedding version was a bit more punky. The idea of it was the contrast...

Chris: It's basically a wedding in Berghain [the famous Berlin techno club], isn't it?

Neil: It is. It's a wedding and clubbing. And Stuart really took it in that direction. It's a combination of hard club music and the genuine joy of a wedding – that's what we tried to put together.

Chris: "Wedding in Berlin" does bookend the Berlin concept.

Neil: There's really only three Berlin tracks on the album, two at the beginning and one at the end. But I remember we were saying: *Sgt. Pepper*, there's only the first track going into the second track and then the reprise at the end that makes it *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* – there's nothing else about it. It's a conceit. But there is something sonically about a lot of this album that to me sounds quite Berlin, particularly what we did at Hansa studios using these old keyboards and all that stuff. At the beginning of the album we get on the train at Uhlandstrasse, go to Warschauer Strasse, we sit by the lake on a summer's afternoon, and then at the end of the song cycle we're in a wedding in Berlin which sounds like it's in Berghain or the Panorama bar. I think it makes the concept work, pretty much. As we've often quoted, Shakespeare said "a comedy ends with a wedding". It's unusual for us not to suggest that were breaking up and never going to make a record again on the last track, as we traditionally do. But this album ends with a wedding.



Photo session at the video location

Monkey business

In January 2020, Pet Shop Boys recorded a video for the single "Monkey business". Annually joined them on set

Tuesday, January 7, 2020. On the top floor of a dance rehearsal studio, Danceworks, in central London, Chris is preparing to rehearse the dance routine he will be doing the following day in the "Monkey business" video. But, given that it is lunchtime, not just yet.

"I'm not continuing without food," he says.

Instead, while lunch is fetched from Pret A Manger (egg sandwich on brown bread, miso soup, crisps), he sits around a table with Neil, discussing how Rupert Everett has just referred to the Pet Shop Boys on *Desert Island Discs* as his "household gods", declaring "Being boring" the most indispensable of his eight music choices. (Neil will not be dancing, and so has nothing to rehearse, but was here for the video production meeting that has just taken place.)

"Wow, I can't believe I'm going to do this," Chris says. "I might have to send everyone out of the room."

Lynne Page, the choreographer, shows him through the routine.

"How many bars is that?" he asks.

"Eight bars," she replies.

"It should be possible, shouldn't it?" he says, as though he can't quite understand how he was ever persuaded to do this. Though he is honest enough to then declare the answer to this unspoken question. "Actually," he concedes, "it was my idea to do it, I think."

He stands up, getting ready.

"I should probably do my stretching exercises," he says. "I don't want to do myself an injury at my age." And then he adds, as though it is one more improbable absurdity, "Sixty!" He bends forwards. "I used to be able to touch my toes," he says as his fingers reach just beyond his knees.

"I've never been able to touch my toes," says Neil.

Chris shows me a text exchange on his phone with David Walliams, who has texted to say how much he loves "Monkey business".

"We're making a proper video with us in it," Chris has replied, which in turn has prompted the following response from David Walliams: "I imagine it will be highly erotic."

Gemma Payne, the assistant choreographer, asks what the concept is for the video.

"Lynne knows," says Chris. In this, he is quite

correct, as Lynne has synthesised what has been discussed in conversations between her, the Pet Shop Boys and the director Vaughan Arnell, into a document that she shows to me on her phone:

We see various big characters entering our club one by one. They are lip synching to the opening lines of the song. They are mischievously excited to be here. Our club is in Paris, Rome, Moscow? A night of hedonism and glamour.

Our characters are either single or are flanked on either side – character breakdown to follow. Neil and Chris are the curators of this evening. They know there is monkey business going on. Like the gods in Greek mythology, they are the orchestrators of everyone's fate. The raised eyebrow looks to camera say "watch, wait and see".

As a subplot we have two shady characters. Who knows what they are up to?? But they carry out their monkey business quietly, calmly and with a malevolent intent. They often subvert every shot, stealing jewellery? Selling diamonds? Fairy dust?? They are beautiful but just a little dangerous.

As we build through the track we see tableaux as the night gets going...

It is at this point that we see a decision from Chris to join in the monkey business and to be part of the story.

For our Pet Shop Boys fans this will be a complete reverse to how the boys are normally perceived. Neil remains calm, still, the master of ceremonies amongst the now energised released party crowd. But Chris is unleashed, we see him in the various dancing tableaux and finally in the mass movement floor dance. Is that really Chris Lowe dancing?

As we build through the track we see duets, trios, quartets start to invade the dance floor; our tick tockers, our drag queens, our club royalty.

On the vocoder section, the whole club melts into a surreal Salvador Dali moment, up is down, nothing is solid, perception is radically altered.

"Hanging from the rafters" turns into carnage, the beast has been released, Neil has cast the spell.

Everyone's inner rebel child is out; it is

Annually.

Monkey business

unconstructed dangerous mayhem.

The final dance is a bacchanalian ritual, totally in synch, out there, but somehow retro/disco with a classic Pet Shop Boys twist.

A huge celebration of unity and the dark side, and Monkey Business!!!

Chris does a few run-throughs – “I like the monkey swing,” he says – and complains about the essential layout of such dance studios: “The problem is, I don’t want to look at myself in the mirror.”

Then he sits down.

“Are you having a rest?” Lynne asks.

“I’m having a rest!” Chris confirms. “I’m 60! I’ve got a bus pass!”

After a short break, he gets up and runs through the routine some more. He also has a video of it so plans to practise some more later at home.

He and Neil discuss whether they should arrive at the video shoot by 10.30 or 11.00.

“11’s better,” Neil suggests, “because we miss the rush hour then.”

“Watford,” sighs Chris, as though they have agreed to something absurdly impractical. “It’s halfway to Blackpool.” (Watford is less than 20 miles from where we are standing.)

Then they head off to buy some more clothes for tomorrow’s shoot.

“I’m trying to look like a dog’s dinner,”

Chris improbably announces.

“Dog’s dinner!” says Neil. “Good song title. I’m writing it down.”

“Anything to do with Pet Shop Boys and animals works,” Chris points out.

Wednesday, January 8. Due to unexpectedly light traffic, both Pet Shop Boys arrive at Pryzm nightclub before 11 o’clock in the morning. Neil has spent the journey discussing geopolitical events with his Afghan Uber driver, who has been filling him in on the very different story that Persian TV has been telling about the overnight Iranian rocket attacks on American military bases.

In the dressing room, someone has spelt out “PET SHOP BOYS” in fake jewels on the counter. Neil and Chris are both concerned that it should be known that it wasn’t them who did this, though it does prompt Chris to wonder – for, surprisingly, the first time – whether there are any interesting anagrams of their name. After consulting an anagram programme on his phone, he concludes that there are not.

As they are, one by one, made up – “Can I be very matt?” Chris asks their make-up artist Jackie, “I don’t want to be shiny” – they wonder when they last appeared in a video. At first they think the answer may be “Minimal”, but then they remember the day they spent driving around Shanghai for the “Thursday” video. Though they add that that video wasn’t a big production like this one is.

Neil puts on the white jacket that he first wore at Hyde Park last September. “This is the most expensive piece of clothing I’ve bought in my life,” he says.

They walk to where the director, Vaughan, is filming characters entering the club. There is something about the nightclub during the daytime that, even though there are no windows, is strange and unnatural. “What a great sticky carpet,” Chris says. “How authentic. Whoever thought it was a good idea having a carpet in a club?”

“Have you learned your bit?” Neil asks Chris.

“Of course,” Chris replies. “I was practising all night.”

For their first shot, they are to sit in a booth, glasses of what appears to be champagne in front of them (it’s sparkling water), while various nightclub action takes place around them.

“Well,” says Chris, “it’ll be lunchtime soon.”

After several takes of this scenario, Chris stands up. “I see a Bafta,” he says. “I see a Bafta. So much acting.”

In the breaks they are photographed for a forthcoming article to appear in the weekend edition of *The Guardian*. (Neil puts on a different jacket – this one black and, like the white jacket, from Celine, purchased yesterday afternoon – for most of these photos.) A white reflector is held, in front and below them, just out of shot, to balance the light on them. After a few images have been taken, Neil asks to have a look at some of them on the camera. “I want to know what I’m being,” he explains.

For the next scene in the video, they are filmed looking at themselves in a circular wall mirror. As the camera rolls, Vaughan shouts an instruction – Neil catches the word “smile”, but isn’t sure whether or not he has picked up the whole communication.

“Did you say ‘smile’ or ‘don’t smile’,”

he asks Vaughan afterwards.

“Don’t smile,” says Vaughan.

“I did a kind of half-smile,” says Neil, “because I couldn’t work out which you meant.”

In between shots they are also filmed in various ways for what they wryly refer to as “assets” – short pieces of content which can be used in various ways on various forms of social media.

They eat lunch in the dressing room, a room which they slowly realise may usually be used for karaoke.



On set with video director Vaughan Arnell

"We've only got seven hours to go," says Chris, evenly.

The first shot after lunch is what Vaughan refers to as "the wedding shot", where the two Pet Shop Boys are surrounded by the whole colourful nightclub denizen cast. The shot is nearly ready to be filmed, with only a single outstanding missing detail.

"I've only got one Pet Shop Boy," he points out. "I need another one".

The second, Neil, steps into place and takes a seat.

Several different versions of the scene are filmed, and in the final one all of the cast are to sing the song's backing vocals. As this shot is set up, Neil leads the cast through an impromptu a cappella rehearsal:

Monkey business!
Look what I found!
Monkey business!
Just playing around!

"Doesn't it look good?" says Stuart Price, who has just arrived on set for a brief visit, and then he and Chris dive into what is clearly an urgently-required frank assessment of the quality and wisdom of Sam Smith's recent cover version of Donna Summer's "I Feel Love". Then it is time for Chris's first dance moves. (Neil, asked whether he dances at all in this video, replies, "No, I'm standing still in the middle of everyone.")

In this scene, Neil sits at a bar stool, and Chris stands behind the bar. After a while, Chris begins to move, and then he is joined by five dancers who rise up from

behind the bar and dance with him in a line. He now does a first on-set rehearsal with the five dancers.

"Oh," he says, "they do it with a lot of attitude. I'll do it in my own inimitable style."

It's time for him to begin dancing for real.

"Is it a closed set?" he asks.

"Closed-ish," bluffs the first assistant director.

"The door's ajar."

Neil asks Vaughan whether they'll first do a rehearsal of the whole scene.

"Now we're not on film," Vaughan tells him, "there's no rehearsals." (The point being that with digital cameras, now there isn't the cost of using film, you might as well film everything.)

Waiting, Chris plays with the credit card reader on the bar.

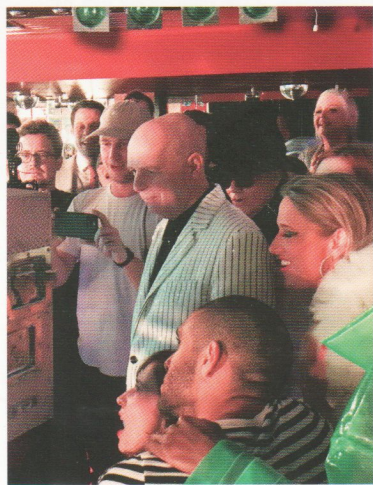
"It's not free," he notes. "This isn't Club Tropicana."

After some of the other characters have been filmed having a "dance-off" on the disco floor, it is time for Chris's full-on dance scene where he dances on the disco floor in unison with the other club-goers.

"It makes you realise how good dancers are," he says. "Movement's not as easy as you think. You realise your body's not doing what you think it is."

After Chris and his companions have been filmed dancing in formation a few times, a slightly different shot is now filmed. This time Neil joins him on the dancefloor and the two of them stand stock still in the middle of all the dancing mayhem.

In a break, they sit over to one side of the club where the wallpaper is made up of a rectangular grid of 1980s record sleeves. It's only now that they realise that in this nightclub where a 2020 Pet Shop Boys





video is being shot, there is already a picture of them – from the sleeve of “West End girls” – permanently on the wall. (As one must, they pose in front of themselves.) Then they move across the room to a scene where Neil leans against a seated area while all the club-goers behind him, including Chris, melt downwards towards the floor.

They are nearing the final shot, which is referred to by everyone as “carnage”, and the clock is ticking towards nine o’clock when filming must stop, but nonetheless it is time for another meal break. Two pizzas from Pizza Express, one with meat, one without, are brought to the Pet Shop Boys’ dressing room and they eat while discussing vegetarians, the possibility that humans might one day evolve so that they could digest grass, and the recent books

On screen and off, during the filming of the video for “Monkey business” at Pryzm nightclub in Watford



of food writer Nigel Slater.

"I've got greasy hands," Neil observes. "So that was dinner, was it?"

"That was it," says Chris.

"Maybe two pieces of pizza and a Pret bar is enough," Neil considers. "I'll have a banana when I get home."

"I want to have a hot bath," says Chris.

Neil counters this with a surprising fact.

"This morning," he says, "I had a cold bath, to energise myself."

"Oh, I couldn't do that," says Chris.

"It's quite exhilarating," Neil says, adding,

"I wouldn't do it if it was a cold day."

Their manager Angela comes in with a progress report.

"Well, we're nearly there," says Chris.

"We're just waiting for carnage," says Neil.

"Normally it just comes along," Angela replies.

"They're going to be ready soon," says Neil in a way that hovers somewhere between wish, prediction and instruction.

"Well, I've had enough," says Chris, in a way that suggests less that he's had enough, more that he's reaching the stage where it seems reasonable to start talking about having had enough.

"I'm 65," Neil sighs.

"He does go on about his age a lot," says Chris.

While waiting, Neil and Chris discuss contemporary urban development in the United Kingdom, using Watford and Margate as case studies. "I think there should be show trials, really," comments Neil.

Eventually, carnage-time arrives. What carnage entails, it turns out, is an eruption of chaotic and boisterous behaviour including smoke, flying ice and sprayed champagne (well, Prosecco, to be precise). Neil points out that he's not having champagne sprayed on his jacket. "It cost a fortune. I've got to wear it on *The One Show*."

At first Neil suggests that he simply won't appear in this scene, but then a compromise is suggested: Neil and Chris will walk into the scene once the worst of the carnage had already unfolded (and all the sparkling wine has already been spilt). This is what happens. They only have one chance to get this shot, but it goes perfectly. Afterwards the whole cast crowds around the monitor to watch the playback.

"It's a great end," Neil declares, then says to Chris: "I thought we were going to walk in and ruin it."

"Didn't we?" asks Chris.





Lyrics

MONGREL

I never knew my father
 Berlin 1945
 He forced himself onto my mother
 All she did was stay alive
 Afterwards he gave her vodka
 and a Russian cigarette
 before he disappeared forever
 and left her with one regret

Me, the little mongrel
 born at the edge of hell
 Times were tough but I was tougher
 I learned that lesson well

I never knew my mother
 just maybe day to day
 She gave me food but no affection
 What could she have to say
 after a war that ended with me
 the uninvited kid?
 She never said she loved me
 because she never did

Me, the little mongrel
 born at the edge of hell
 Life was rough but I was rougher
 I learned that lesson well

I was always the problem
 the one who made things worse
 I made her old and bitter
 I made her cry and curse

I never knew my father
 or where exactly he was from
 Do you think he could have loved me
 the product of his sperm?
 Father, I never knew you
 Mother, I was your curse
 the crying little bastard
 who only made things worse

Me, the little mongrel
 born at the edge of hell
 Times were tough but I was tougher
 I learned that lesson well
 Me, the little mongrel from hell

SOUP

Chicken noodle
 Minestrone
 Cream of mushroom soup
 Try some clam chowder
 and maybe lentil too

A nice can of soup
 can help you
 when you're stuck in a loop
 If you're feeling hungry
 alone and angry
 heat up a little can of soup
 It won't let you down

It won't let you down
 It won't let you down
 when you're starting to droop
 and you're feeling hungry
 alone and angry
 Heat up a little can of soup

Split pea with bacon
 Cream of sweetcorn
 Asparagus is cute
 Cream of tomato
 My mother made cabbage soup
 It won't let you down

It won't let you down
 It won't let you down
 When you're starting to droop
 and you're feeling hungry
 alone and angry
 heat up a little can of soup

If you make it
 into an artwork
 you won't be stuck in a loop
 When you've no idea
 try this panacea
 Paint a little can of soup
 It won't let you down

It won't let you down
 It won't let you down
 When you're starting to droop
 and you're feeling hungry
 alone and angry
 heat up a little can of soup
 It won't let you down

RUN, GIRL, RUN

Run, girl, run
away from the sun
Napalm burns
so close to your body
Photographers shoot
cameras roll
The western world
would like to say sorry

Run, girl, run
You'll be someone
one fine morning
without any warning

Because peace comes
from the barrel of a gun
a thousand flowers
will bloom where you run
Intellectuals frown
Headlines scream
Nixon's a clown
Mao is obscene

Run, girl, run
It's only begun
You're going far
They've made you a star

What d'you want to be?
Joan of Arc on TV?
A whore or a nun?
Run, girl, run
You'll be enshrined
in the Guggenheim
The western art world
needs another icon

Run, girl, run
You'll be someone
one fine morning
without any warning
Run, girl, run
You've only begun
You're going far
They've made you a star
Is that what you want?

Run, girl, run
Run, girl, run

ICH BIN MUSIK (RADIO EDIT)

Ich bin musik
Musik bin Ich
Music, I own you
Don't call me a freak
I've given you good times
I've brought you down low
Ich bin Musik
How low can you go?

I am music
Music is me
It's all that I live for
It's setting me free
When I'm not dancing
I'm still in a show
Ich bin Musik
Taxi zum klo!

Sometimes when I'm sleeping
it's still calling me
I can't stop creating
I'm finding the key

I'll be dreaming
of a crazy new scene
where music is playing
and I am the queen

Ich bin musik
Not always in tune
but I am music
I reach for the moon
and howl like a baby
Scream like a witch
Ich bin Musik
Ohne mich ist es nichts

Ich bin musik
Musik bin Mich
Music, I own you
Don't call me a freak
I've given you good times
I've brought you down low
Ich bin Musik
Taxi zum klo!
I am music
How low can you go?

FOR EVERY MOMENT

You gotta live your life
in a state of independence
A private agenda
A path of your own
If sometimes the world feels like a fortress
you have to escape

'cause you've got to live your life
for every moment
From the shock of arrival
in a new world we share
to the pain of survival
I've always been there

You gotta look ahead
don't fear the future
bury the past
or make it your own
Create a world
outside your window
Take it from me

You've got to
live your life
for every moment
from the shock of arrival
in a new world we share
to the pain of survival
I've always been there

AN OPEN MIND

When we walked in high heels
over broken glass
in our chequered past
We took two steps forward
one step back
That was our plan of attack

We were all there for pleasure
at the latest whatever
We were never left behind
Single-minded forever
Didn't feel any pressure
Guess we kept an open mind
An open mind
Yes we kept an open mind

In the name of fashion
and bohemian life
fresh as debutantes
When you don't belong there
you don't care what they think
but you know what you want

We were all there for pleasure
at the latest whatever
We were never left behind
Single-minded forever
Didn't feel any pressure
Guess we kept an open mind
an open mind
Yes we kept an open mind

There is beauty in ugliness
and ugliness in beauty
everywhere, all the time
Style and ambition
fading in an admission
that we share an open mind
An open mind

Single-minded forever
Didn't feel any pressure
Guess we kept an open mind

There is beauty in ugliness
and ugliness in beauty
everywhere, all the time
Style and ambition
fading in an admission
that we share an open mind
An open mind

DECIDE

It's time to make up your mind
It's time to make up your mind

Do we want to fight
or do we want to love?
Can't we just live together?
Do we want to stay
or do we want to run?
Could this dream not last forever?

It's time to make up your mind

Do we want to sink
or do we want to swim?
The rain can't last forever
Do we want to die
or do we want to live?
Surely we belong together?

It's never too late

Fight for love
or love to fight
Oh, what have we done?
What have we done?

It's never too late
It's never too late

Fight for love
or love to fight
Oh, what have we done?
What have we done?

AT ROCK BOTTOM

Everyone talks about
their loss and the legacy
Sharing condolences
and offering sympathy
But at rock bottom
what got him?
It's all about
It's all about
It's all about
It's all about drugs

One day when we wake up from
the media reverie
and think about
how hard it was
and also how heavily
he hit it
It shot him
We're all at
rock bottom
It's all about
It's all about
It's all about
It's all about drugs

And that means
that someone
was lonely and in pain
Couldn't deal with it
or even try to explain
It's all about
It's all about
(It's all about love)
It's all about
(It's all about love)
It's all about drugs

NO BOUNDARIES

Kiss me, caress me, talk dirty for love
Coming and going, we can't get enough
Sweaty and subtle we're in this for good
Living a new life where love has no boundaries
I'm not the same as you
You're not the same as me
but we both agree
that love has no boundaries

ਮੈਂ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਪਿਆਰ ਕਰਦਾ ਹਾਂ
(I love you)

Do you understand me? I think that you do
I'll give you the meaning right now in full view
Coming and going, we can't get enough
Living a new life where love has no boundaries
It's the same for you
as it is for me
We don't disagree
'cause love has no boundaries
Love has no boundaries

ਮੈਂ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਪਿਆਰ ਕਰਦਾ ਹਾਂ
(I love you)

If I am the question that has to be asked
You are the answer spoken at last
Coming and going like sea over sand
We both understand that love has no
boundaries
I'm not the same as you
You're not the same as me
Anyone can see
that love has no boundaries
Love has no boundaries
Love has no boundaries

ANGELIC THUG

Alpha male alright
Born to lead the fight
Not as daft as you might think
when he's been on the drink

He's a handsome boy
Someone's pride and joy
Staring in the dark
a loyal dog about to bark

So British
working class
got a handsome mug
Talks dirty
looks so pretty
He's an angelic thug

Levis, Docs and Bens
Talks a lot of sense
Says he's not an idiot
He don't sit on the fence

Takes it on the chin
No matter when he's been
Thinks he's cool and clandestine
beneath that perfect skin

So British
working class
got a handsome mug
talks dirty
looks so pretty
He's an angelic thug

That look in his eyes
a consolation prize
What he stops to ask you for
may come as a surprise

So British
working class
got a handsome mug
talks dirty
looks so pretty
He's an angelic thug
An angelic thug

"Ere! Vada the eek on that!
Lovely lallies.
Nice bit of rough trade..."

Letters

In each issue of Annually, Neil and Chris will answer a selection of letters.

Questions are solicited via petshopboys.co.uk ahead of each new issue.

Hi there, I'm a huge fan and my question is, how are you today?

Adam, Western Australia.

Neil: It's a normal day in London before Christmas. This morning I started wrapping my Christmas presents, but I ran out of Sellotape.

Chris: My mum's coming today, and the Tube trains to Euston are not working. It's just one of these days. And my Senior Rail Card, which I've been very proud of, which is in an app on my phone, I was showing it to someone yesterday, and it's disappeared. It's just gone. Gone. And I can't reload it. It's annoying. So tomorrow I'm going to have to spend several hours trying to get through to someone to get my Senior Rail Card back into my phone, and I have to do this before I travel on the day after tomorrow.

Neil: Why can't you just have an actual card?

Chris: Well, I wish I'd done that now. When you read people's reviews online they say, "Go for the physical copy." But I thought: I'm going to be modern. Who knew it was going to be such a problem?

Dear Neil and Chris, do we have any influence with our comments on your decisions?

Sonia, Seville.

Chris: The answer's "yes", isn't it? Because didn't somebody say they wanted our show to be "more banging and lasers"? So that's exactly what you got, because of that. So we do listen. We're like politicians – we listen and we care.

Neil: We of course also might listen and just ignore what's been said. But we do read what's been said.

Chris: Neil quite often reads people's Facebook comments.

Neil: Yeah, on our Facebook page. Actually I've sort of stopped doing that a bit recently.

Chris: Neil's always saying, "Oh, the fans really hate this one... they don't like this one."

Neil: They do, however, love "Decide".

Chris: Anyway, keep your comments coming. The more negative the better, of course.

Morning. Here is my question: Who, if anyone, is the new saviour of Pop music?

Matt.

Chris: Well that sort of implies that it's dying, doesn't it?

Neil: It implies that it needs to be saved.

Chris: I don't really know what pop music is, really. I don't listen to the radio. What is pop music? What is it?

Neil: Taylor Swift.

Chris: Is it not all a bit dreary? Is that what the problem is with it?

Neil: I like Lizzo, if she's pop music.

Chris: I don't know who she is.

Neil: I don't think she's the saviour of pop music but she's sort of a good thing. But whether pop music needs saving... I think pop music has good phases and less good phases.

Chris: I think it probably means a lot to young people, like it should, but I don't really have any connection to it.

Neil: I actually quite like pop music at the moment. I like some tracks on Taylor Swift's album. In particular, the song "The Archer". I like that mellow post-Weeknd guy, Post Malone. For me, it's not been a bad year for pop music.

Chris: I think Neil's calling it "a golden era of pop".

Neil: The other week on Spotify I listened to the top 12 or something, and I thought, "I like all this music." There's a sort of mellow, dancey, electro, Weeknd-y sound that I broadly-speaking quite like. Because sometimes I basically hate the sound of pop music, but I don't hate it at the moment.

What's the latest time you've ever gone to bed?

Richard, Aylesbury.

Chris: That's a good question.

Neil: Well, there's been times I haven't gone to bed, but not for years. I always remember that in 1997, May 1st, when Labour won the election, I went out to two parties and then I was invited to the Labour Party party at the Royal Festival Hall, and there I was invited to go back to something at the Grovesnor House Hotel. And we were drinking champagne and I suddenly realised that the sun was shining outside. It was about six in the morning. And I just went home and watched the television all day, so I didn't actually go to bed.

Chris: Wow.

Neil: When I was teenager I did that a couple

of times. But it's very rare for me to do an all-nighter. I'm not a Keith Richards type. I normally go to bed at about midnight to half past 12, and I normally get up at about 8.30, or 8.45.

Chris: Neil normally sets his alarm for exactly eight hours after he goes to bed.

Neil: Yes, he does. I don't just sleep in for the sake of it. Whereas Chris...

Chris: I don't really know the latest I've stayed up. It would have been a long time ago. I can sometimes panic a bit if the sun's coming up and I haven't gone to bed. Because, as we all know, I like sleeping. And I really don't like to miss any sleep. Unlike Neil, if I hadn't gone to bed I would try to get some sleep the following afternoon. But this never happens anymore.

Neil: Too old. He's got a Senior Rail Card.

Chris: See earlier question. Though maybe it disapproved of me being so young.

Neil: They probably thought, "I know he *can* have one of these, but I think it's inappropriate with his lifestyle."

Chris: The latest I've ever gone to bed would probably be the mid-afternoon of the day after the night before. But now I usually go to bed at about 12, one-ish. And then get up around nine. But then, famously, I like to have breakfast and then go back to bed. Wake up again for lunch.

When was the last time either of you used a lawnmower?

Anna.

Neil: Not since I was a child, or a teenager. We had a lawnmower at home, because we had a lawn, and I occasionally mowed the lawn. My father did it really. I can still picture my father with his sleeves rolled up, going at quite a speed. Actually, there were two lawnmowers. We had a very old-fashioned one, and then we had a more modern one – I'm talking about the 1960s here – which had a thing on the front to catch the grass cuttings. Now I have a lawn, but I don't cut it myself. In fact, the guy that does told me only the other day that I need a new lawnmower in the new year.

Chris: Is it one of those ones that you sit on, like a tractor?

Neil: Of course. They make a right noise as well.

Chris: I know that when I was a child we had one of those that you had to push, so I obviously had a go on that. It had the little container to collect all the grass. We never had one of those Flymo ones, those sort of hovercraft-y things. We just had a push one. I don't think I've mowed a lawn since then, and even then that would have just been a bit of a novelty. I wouldn't have been doing it seriously. I imagine you'd get blisters and things, and these hands...

Neil: It's good exercise, though.

Chris: It's one of those things, I bet you can't even get

a manual one anymore. They have electric cables and motors, don't they? See, now they'd use an electric lawnmower and then go to the gym to keep fit. Whereas they could have actually combined both things: get a good lawn and be healthy at the same time.

Neil: I always think about how much exercise you get with an old-fashioned Hoover.

Chris: Or with a Ewbank.

Neil: I don't even know what a Ewbank is.

Chris: That was the brand name – it was like a Hoover but it wasn't connected to the mains.

Neil: Oh, we used to call them a carpet-sweeper. Did they ever work, those things?

Chris: Yeah. You sometimes see people use them in hotel lobbies.

Neil: Not a lawnmower, but a related thing: when my father used to play cricket, my brother Simon and I used to go with him, and at the cricket club my father belonged to they had a steam-roller for rolling turf to make it smooth, and Simon and I got into a lot of trouble for turning it on and trundling towards the cricket pavilion. We probably couldn't stop it, either.

Chris: Wow.

Neil: Also, if I was to use this as an opportunity to complain about something, it would be: why are leaf-blowers so noisy? In my street in London they blow the leaves away and the noise it makes is phenomenal. Quite honestly, you could do it with a broom.

Chris: Rather than blowing them away, why don't they vacuum them up? That's what I don't understand.

Neil: Vacuum them into a mulch which is recycled.

Chris: Just blowing them around seems a bit pointless to me. Then the wind blows the next day and blows them back all over the place.

Neil: And then the bloke's back, making this incredibly loud noise.

Chris: It's just madness – utter madness. It's like those things that clean the roads that don't clean the road.

Neil: They just make a noise.

Chris: And go round cars, and move rubbish from one place to another.

Neil: As I always say: they destroyed privacy, and now they're destroying silence. In your house you can always just hear some weird thing – some condenser boiler making an annoying noise.

Chris: And putting steam out at the front of the house.

Neil: There was the time when I had my house decorated and I thought: "What's that *steam*? Those people next door have got a condenser boiler and it's coming into my garden!" I went out there, and it was mine. I didn't even know I had one. They didn't tell me.

In the lecture at the Royal Academy of Arts in May when I asked you if you would ever write an opera your answer was a resounding no (the shortest answer ever in a lecture, haha!), could you please give a more

detailed explanation to it?

Francisco, Spain.

Neil: It wasn't a lecture – I answered questions.

Chris: It was a finger-wagging, was it?

Neil: No, it wasn't a finger-wagging.

Chris: A rant?

Neil: No.

Chris: They weren't happy with your answer.

Neil: We were once asked to write an opera by the director Robert Wilson who directed a lot of Philip Glass's operas. It was for the National Theatre of Greece and it was an adaptation of either *The Iliad* or *Aeneid* – I can't remember which. We were very flattered to be asked by Robert Wilson but we turned it down.

Chris: He wanted us to do it in a week.

Neil: He phoned me up and I said, "We're making an album." I think we were making *Yes* at the time. Or maybe *Elysium*. And he said, "Well, can't you do what Lou Reed does and just make it your new album?" And I said, "No, not really." So we didn't. It seemed a bit weird, us writing something for the National Theatre of Greece of a famous work of classical Greek literature. But also I don't think we've ever had a desire to write an opera. Funnily enough, it's not a form we actually love. So I don't think we will ever write an opera.

What is your favourite David Bowie song? Mine are "Absolute Beginners", "Life On Mars", "Let's Dance" and "Ashes to Ashes".

Ace.

Neil: Well, if you go through them chronologically, I love "Wild Eyed Boy From Freecloud" from his first RCA album. "After All" from *The Man Who Sold The World*. "Changes" on *Hunky Dory*. "Sweet Thing" from *Diamond Dogs*. "This Is Not America" with Pat Metheny. "Where Are We Now?" and then the last track of his last album, "I Can't Give Everything Away".

Chris: Which is what we do now.

Neil: Which is what we all do now. That was David Bowie's complaint about Spotify. But that's a random list.

Chris: I really like the song that goes *don't believe in yourself*? "Quicksand". I like "Boys Keep Swinging".

Neil: Lovely song.

Chris: Looking at his greatest hits, I like "Changes". I like "Life On Mars". I like "Five Years", and that's not even on here. A lot of my favourite tracks are album tracks. And I like David Bowie's bit of "Under Pressure". It's very David Bowie-ish. And I like "The London Boys".

Neil: Good one.

Chris: I've got all of *Hunky Dory* on my phone for some reason.

Neil: His best album.

Chris: "Oh, You Pretty Things", that's good. And of course I like the Mott The Hoople one, "All The Young Dudes" – that's probably one of my favourite of his songs.

Neil: An amazing thing to have given a song that good to someone else.

How come you decided to break your "one-word title" rule for the release of *Inner Sanctum*?

Nenad, Belgrade.

Neil: Oh, good question.

Chris: *Inner Sanctum* wasn't an album, was it?

Neil: It was a CD. I think the one-word rule applies to albums, it doesn't apply to DVDs. The exception I can think of is the Japan-only *I like it here wherever it is*. And with *Inner Sanctum*, the show was called *Inner Sanctum*. It's a bit like *It couldn't happen here* is called *It couldn't happen here*. Although, by the way, this issue didn't even occur to us because we thought of this as being a DVD not an album, even though it is a live album as well. But the reason is that it's a record of the show, and the show didn't have a one-word title. So the question is really: how come we did a show without a one-word title?

Chris: But we don't have a one-word title rule for shows.

Neil: Apart from the fact that we've had *Performance, Discovery...*

Chris: But it was never a rule.

Neil: No, it wasn't a rule. It was a habit but not a rule. Whereas the album thing is a rule.

Chris: When did it become a rule, though? It didn't become a rule before *Please*, did it? It was never in a manifesto.

Neil: No, it was a habit that was so habitual that it gained the force of a rule. Because we thought of calling *Bilingual* by the name *Pet Shop Boys: That's the way life is*. It's possible that we were thinking of deliberately breaking the rule, but after having not broken it then, we realised that was it. Of course with our current album we're stretching the rule, because of course it could be two words: *Hot Spot*. It's in the dictionary as one word and as two words. And of course *PopArt* is really pushing it, to make it one word.

Chris: Although it was sort of two albums, wasn't it, melded into one.

Neil: Melded and welded.

I'd like to ask the following question: Having worked together over decades, with all its ups and downs, you must have had some arguments between the two of you. What is the most ridiculous argument you have ever had?

Marcel, Netherlands.

Chris: Well, it would have just been over one of us – probably me – being pedantic.

Neil: I bet most people think I'm the more pedantic one.

Chris: There was a really good text message conversation we had quite recently about absolutely nothing that went on for a very long time.

Neil: It wasn't a row.

Chris: No, it was over absolutely nothing.

Please find below my questions for *PSB Annually 2020*: Where do you recommend to find the best Bratwurst in Berlin? And what's up with Morrissey? *Tony, London.*

Neil: There's an organic Bratwurst store near KaDeWe. What's the square called?

Chris: Wittenbergplatz.

Neil: That's a good place to go to get a choice of Bratwurst or Thüringer. I don't think you'll get our favourite sausage which is a Nürnberger. They're little sausages – they're very good.

Chris: It's called Witty's.

Neil: But we hardly ever eat Bratwurst now. When we first went to Berlin a lot we used to eat sausages, but I think we've sort of lost interest a bit.

Chris: Though we did have a very good Thüringer in a Christmas market.

Neil: Yes, we did. As for Morrissey, as I said during a phone interview with the *Scottish Daily Record* yesterday when the interviewer asked me about Morrissey, I said, "As Morrissey would say, 'That is the undiscussable.'"

Chris: Very clever answer.

Have you seen the movie *Bros: After The Screaming Stops* and if you did, what did you think about it? It has become quite a cult hit. *Coen, Leiden.*

Neil: I've only seen it three times. Chris has only seen it twice. I watched it by myself on our studio computer in Berlin, then Chris and I watched it together the next night. And then when we went to Los Angeles to finish, or sort of finish, working on the album, we watched it with Stuart Price, who then became very obsessed by it. It's interesting for us, of course, because when Bros had their initial phase of success in the late '80s, we had the same manager, so we were around, and we used to see quite a lot of them. It was interesting to see how they have and haven't – mainly haven't – changed in the succeeding 30 years. But it's a very entertaining documentary.

Chris: As Neil said, I've seen it twice. It's a very good film, really – they didn't hold anything back. Very entertaining. A jolly good watch. It had to be for Neil to watch it three times.

Neil: I could watch it again, really.

Chris: And because we watched it with Stuart, it became very much part of the recording of this album for us. Because when you're working with Stuart, there's a lot of chat, and there was a lot of chat about this film. I think there's talk of a sequel.

Neil: Yes, although what the point of it will be, I don't know.

Chris: More of the same!

Hello Neil and Chris. Have you seen Harry Clayton-Wright's performance of Liza's *Results* album? He lip synchs the entire record, and first performed it on a loop for eight hours at the Marlborough Pub & Theatre in Brighton, then (for a mere 45 minutes) at Duckie in Vauxhall. *Stuart.*

Neil: No – it sounds great.

Chris: Wow. Why wasn't that in Edinburgh?

Neil: Good for him. We shall probably look it up on the internet.

My question is: What is the best piece of advice you received about anything (life, career, even household tip) that we'd also benefit from hearing? *Aubrey.*

Chris: I can't think of anything.

Neil: My mind's gone blank.

Chris: I suppose the advice I always had was "just do your best". I think that really was to do with exams – you've done all the work you can do, you've done all the revision, and you get to the exam knowing that you couldn't really have done anymore, so if you fail you know that you've tried your hardest, and that's good enough. That's something I've probably taken. You can only try your best. "As long as you've done your best..."

Neil: And have you?

Chris: I've done enough.

Can you please tell us how that bass sound from "West End girls" was made, as there are a lot of different theories out there, on whether it was just one analog synth such as a Mini Moog or a layered sound made of different synths from an Emulator II? It would be great if Chris and Neil could give us the definitive answer! *Faran.*

Neil: I assume this is the hit version of "West End girls". Because the Bobby O version is a sample on an Emulator. On the Stephen Hague version, the bass line is actually played by Stephen Hague.

Chris: I think it's a MIDI collection of two or three

sounds, all MIDI-ed up. I think, but I probably wasn't paying that much attention at the time. I was probably asleep at the back of the studio. Because it was a *torturous* process, making that album.

Neil: That was the single, and it took a week. Five days. Almost two days was spent on the bass line. He took Chris's bass line, and I think it was a MIDI-ed collection of sounds.

Chris: Yeah, you need something to give it a bit of top, something to give it a bit of middle, something to give it a bit of weight at the bottom. That's how I think it was done.

Hi I'm Lorenzo and I am a Pet Head since the year one. My question is this:
Why the B-side of every PSB single much better than the A-side?
Lorenzo.

Neil: Well, that's simply nonsense. I mean, is "A man can get arrested" better than "West End girls"? I don't think it is. Is "That's my impression" better than "Love comes quickly"?

Chris: He's really hit a nerve. Is "The sound of the atom splitting" better than...

Neil: ... "Left to my own devices". I don't think they are, but I of course think we've put some great songs on b-sides. Like "Shameless" on the b-side of "Go West". But it's not better than "Go West". I know there are people who liked one of the b-side tracks of "Dreamland" more than "Dreamland" because I've read that on Facebook, "An open mind". And some people like "Decide" more than "Burning the heather". What I think is that people should be pleased at the quality of the b-sides. But is "Do I have to?" better than "Always on my mind"? It's a very lovely song, but it's not better. It's different. It's a different style. And it's great to have the two things together. We've always taken that really seriously. Sometimes we've chosen songs that are almost similar in style, like "Go West" and "Shameless", and sometimes very contrasting, like "Burning the heather" and "Decide". But I think to say that they're better is simply factually incorrect.

Chris: On streaming services now, everything's equal, isn't it? There's no such thing as an a-side or a b-side or an album track. Everything has equivalence. I think what it is with a b-side is that if you're a fan it's slightly more obscure, maybe, and therefore it's a bit more special to you.

Neil: If you put out "That's my impression" as a single and stuck "Love comes quickly" on the b-side, people would say, why did you do that?

Chris: Though, funnily enough, when we first took "Opportunities" to be mastered, the engineer was engineering "In the night."

Neil: He assumed that was the a-side.

Chris: He couldn't believe that it was the b-side.

Neil: So from day one, someone's said that to us.

What is the last song that made you cry when you listened to it? Mine often is "Wind Of Change" by the Scorpions, or "The survivors" by you.
Steffen.

Chris: "The survivors" is very sad, isn't it?

Neil: Yes, it is. But I don't cry to songs that much.

Chris: Heart of stone, that Neil Tennant. I'll tell you what makes me cry is that song in *The Sound Of Music* where Christopher Plummer joins...

Neil: "Edelweiss".

Chris: It's not so much the song, it's that scene in the film. That moment in the film. It's very hard to control yourself.

Neil: The song we have that makes me feel like crying is "Being boring". And also, actually, though I may be totally alone in this, "Home and dry". The slow version – the one we did last year. Particularly when we played in the Budokan and all the audience got their phones out. That did actually bring tears to my eyes earlier this year. Songs by other people, I don't really react with tears very often. I have done, but I can't think of an example. Oh, "Nothing Compares 2 U" by Sinead O'Connor.

Chris: One particular one is "That's All I Want From You" by Nina Simone. That's a bit of a teary one.

"One Day I'll Fly Away", Randy Crawford.

Neil: At funerals, yeah. That's made me cry.

Chris: "I'll Be Seeing You", Peggy Lee.



Nippon Budokan, Tokyo

My 12-year-old daughter was excited to learn that fans could ask questions & that they may get answered in next year's *Annually* book. Firstly, she announced that she wanted to ask if you'd both come to ours for Christmas lunch this year – I explained that you were probably busy with your families & friends. :-) She then revised her questions & here they are:

1. "Chris is the cool one. Does Chris ever write any of the lyrics for your songs & if so which songs has he done this for?"

2. "My mum met you recently, Neil. You were at the

bar at the *A Not So Silent Night* after-party last Friday. She went to get your *One Hundred Lyrics* book from the cloakroom because you said you'd sign it. But you'd left when she got back to the bar area with the book (Mum says she could see you walking away outside but that she wasn't going to chase you – even though you are Neil Tennant.) Did you forget to wait for her or were you in a hurry to get home?"
Orla, Bournemouth.

Chris: "Chris is the cool one?"

Neil: Well, of course you are.

Chris: That's questionable. The answer about the song is: very rarely. There are ones but they're rubbish.

Neil: "Let's make lots of money"...

Chris: Crass.

Neil: "Paninaro".

Chris: A list.

Neil: There's a few lists, actually.

Chris: I can do lists. It's not really lyrics.

Neil: The most sexually-explicit song in the Pet Shop Boys catalogue, "The secrets of sexual attraction".

Chris: This is for a 12-year-old.

Neil: It's very direct.

Chris: Crass, and awful. Sometimes it's quite nice to put a vocal on, but then you've got to have something to bloody say!

Neil: There's "Decide".

Chris: Exactly. Unlistenable.

Neil: Someone suggested somewhere that it's the first song where Neil and Chris sing together.

Chris: Are we calling it a duet? But what about "Paninaro"?

Neil: They mean singing the same line together. But apparently there's also a bit in "This used to be the future" where that happens.

Chris: Oh, okay.

Neil: As for her mother, I do remember that. I was leaving and she said, "If I get my book, will you sign it?" and I said, "Yes." And then my Uber was there, and so she missed her slot, unfortunately.

Chris: You can't keep an Uber driver waiting.

Neil: No, and I had waited for a while, but I'm sorry if she was disappointed.

Chris: She's quite lucky – she's got one of the few unsigned copies.

Neil: Now, don't start that. And about Christmas lunch, her mother is right that we will indeed be with family and friends, but it's a very kind invitation, thank you.

Chris: It's a very lovely invitation, but Christmas is a time for families, really, isn't it?

What do you think your most Pet Shop Boys-y album title is, and what title do you think is the weakest?

Happy New Year! Party till you drop!

Brigitte.

Neil: I think *Actually* is the most Pet Shop Boys-y, because it's...

Chris: ... a sentence.

Neil: It's got no verb, of course, but it works as a sentence. We always used to say, "It's like an answer to a question." "Pet Shop Boys, actually." And the weakest one? It depends what your criteria are, but I think that *Introspective* is the weakest one. We chose it, we said at the time, because the songs are sort of introspective, which they sort of are, but actually we really chose it because it sounded a bit like it could be an acid house club night. The ... *spective* bit anyway, rather than the *intro*... bit. There was somewhere called Spectrum, so it was meant to be something like that, but I always thought it was a strange title for a sort of clubby album. But it is what it is. Once something's released and out there, that's it – there's no point in having regrets, or marking them out of ten. I think what's interesting is that you can look at every album title and then conjure up the contents of the album, and sometimes even the whole era. I think that's good.

Chris: I probably agree with that. They just are what they are. I don't really think about their strength. I'll tell you what's a bad album title – Coldplay's *Everyday Life*. But maybe it's just meant to be a boring album with a boring title.

Chris: How old were you when you passed your driving test and was it first time?
Jay.

Chris: It wasn't the first time. The examiners were very poor. If I was to give the examiner a mark out of ten, it would be less than five. Because my driving, as everybody knows, is impeccable.

Neil: Chris is a good driver.

Chris: Funnily enough, taking your test in Blackpool is – or it was – one of the hardest places to pass. Because I know people who took their test in London and flew through it, and I was, "You're not even a good driver." So I think I have to mark the examiners down in Blackpool.

Neil: Why did you actually fail it?

Chris: I can't remember. I don't know, actually.

Neil: I bet you were really mad.

Chris: I was. I was: right, that's it! I'm not driving! Never again! I'm not going through that! But mum and dad said, "You have to be able to drive." I'm not sure how old I was. I must have been about 18 because I had a car at university – I had a Saab. And I do like driving. But not really anymore, because there's no pleasure in it anymore.

Neil: Because of...?

Chris: In London there's a 20-mile-an-hour speed limit, which I know is very sensible, but people are walking past you. And there's nowhere to park, there's speed bumps, all the roads have been closed,

you can't really get anywhere, the motorway is just traffic jams the whole way. So you can't enjoy it really anymore. I think it's over, sadly. But I still like cars. I like looking at them.

Hello! I am 15 years old, and I am a huge PSB fan! This is my first time asking questions. What are each of your favorite songs from the newest album, *Hotspot?*
Leni.

Neil: I think my favourite song is "Hoping for a miracle".

Chris: I need to look up what's on it. [Looks at track-listing on his phone.] They're all pretty good, actually, looking at this list here.

Neil: It's a very, very tuneful album.

Chris: Well, I obviously like "Dreamland". It's difficult to choose favourites really. I mean, it's like your children – you don't have a favourite child, do you? Or you certainly don't talk about it if you do. I think that's my answer: they're all my children, and I don't have a favourite child.

You guys look good how do you keep fit? Love from Denmark.
Ulrik.

Chris: Well, that's very kind – I don't think so.

Neil: That is very kind indeed. I used to run two or three times a week, as was probably mentioned many times in the old *Literally*, but I've stopped doing that, and I now walk every day between four and five miles. I stopped running because one day I was running down Chelsea Embankment and I tripped on an irregular paving stone. I was just running along, listening to music, and suddenly I was on the ground. And it occurred to me that it would be very easy to break your arm, or something like that. As I'd been running since 1981, I'd decided that maybe 35 years of running was enough. I sort of miss it, but I suddenly got paranoid that I could fall over and we'd have to cancel a tour or something. But I like walking four or five miles a day, in London particularly. I often walk from my house in Chelsea to the West End and then walk back again. I do know how far I walk only because your iPhone has an app called Health which records it for you, and someone pointed it out to me. I wasn't going to have a Fitbit. That's the main exercise that I take. When I had my house in Durham, which I sold two years ago, I used to have a swimming pool so I'd swim 40 lengths in there every now and then, but I don't go swimming very often now, which is probably bad.

Chris: I walk a lot as well – not just for the sake of it but because it's easier to get round London. You know how long it's going to take. And quite often I run – if

I've had dinner somewhere in London, afterwards I'll quite often run quite a long way. I spontaneously start sprinting down the road.

Neil: Do you?

Chris: Yeah. I suppose it might look a bit odd – it must be a bit disconcerting for some people – but sometimes I just want to run...

Neil: I'm surprised you haven't been stopped by the police.

Chris: Particularly at night, I quite like running. Not in shorts or anything. I just set off and run. I particularly like it in light drizzle. Also, a good way to get somewhere faster is to run between two lampposts and then walk to the next lamppost, and then run... so you run, walk, run.

Neil: I'm amazed you don't get stopped by the police.

Chris: Sometimes I just feel so euphoric. The other thing I'll do is run up the escalators at Holborn tube station, which is brilliant. It's no mean feat, actually. Sometimes you can get to the top and think: is my heart actually up for this?

Neil: I always walk up the escalators at the tube station. Always walk.

Chris: But you never run?

Neil: No, I don't run. But I walk quite fast. Holborn, for people who don't know, has got enormously high escalators.

Chris: I also, though this comes in phases, sometimes decide I need to get fit, so I start doing simple exercises like star jumps, push ups, sits up using one of these inflatable balls. I've also got a little weights bench. But there are just periods of me doing it, then I lose interest again because I see no gain. I would quite like to join a gym, but then I think: we're going to go on tour, we're going to do this... if you had a normal job, a regular job, you could fit this in. But we haven't. You think: well, I'm not going to sign up for a gym because I'm going to be away for three months. You can't get into a routine ever. So I just do bits and bobs. There's nothing regimented in my life, regarding fitness.

How was the exact moment when you realized that success had come?

Jack.

Neil: I don't think there was an exact moment.

Chris: There are stock answers to this that pop stars give.

Neil: What do you mean by success?

Chris: Does it mean when you can get someone to phone up the Ivy and get you a table at two minutes' notice, that sort of thing?

Neil: Or is it when we did the Capital Radio Junior Disco in 1985, and I waved at a girl and the entire side of the theatre waved back at me?

Chris: Yeah. Is that success?

Neil: Or is that just... fame, or whatever?

Chris: We need to define what success is, don't we, to know if we've reached it or not. I mean, have we made the perfect record?

Neil: Does this mean material success? Professional success?

Chris: We knew that we hadn't had any success when we released the first "... let's make lots of money". We'd had a bit of minor underground success with the first "West End girls", and then we definitely knew that we hadn't had any success with the first "Opportunities".

Neil: Although we did once hear it in Italy on the radio.

Chris: So we knew we weren't successful at that point. Do you know, I suppose the answer would be appearing on *Top Of The Pops* for "West End girls". That's sort of success, isn't it? Okay, it might have just been limited, but...

Neil: Yes, the first *Top Of The Pops* appearance.

Chris: That is a very odd moment, to appear on a programme that you've spent your entire childhood watching. It is, to use a word a lot of people overuse, surreal. But it genuinely is surreal. Almost nightmarish.

Neil: I don't think it was nightmarish. Well, watching it back...

Chris: It's like you're watching the TV and then you're on it!

Hello. Do Pet Shop Boys plan on releasing the "dark techno" tracks written during the "Super" sessions?
Dan, Kalamazoo.

Chris: I don't know what they are.

Neil: When he says "the dark techno tracks", I immediately think: wow, they sound good! But that's not really what they are, unfortunately. There's a few tracks – there's a song called "The out crowd" which is maybe from earlier. There's the one that goes "clean air hybrid electric bus", but that's sort of psychedelic. There's one with a Russian theme that's techno-ish, and even from this album there's the one that Stuart likes that we don't particularly like, "Collector's item". Who knows? What there really is is an unreleased body of second-rate songs.

What colour is Tuesday?

Anthony, Brisbane.

Neil: Now that's an old *Smash Hits* question. And Tuesday, as everyone knows, is green.

Chris: Oh, is there a correct answer?

Neil: No, no, I think it's green.

Chris: There's seven days of the week... how many colours are there? I mean, there's only three primary colours, but then there's all the others. I think we're still coming out of the weekend, aren't we, so I'll go

for mauve. Cerise on a Wednesday.

Neil: I say green because that's just what I see in my head when I'm asked that question. I don't know why. It also makes me think, for some reason, of forests.

Which would you resurrect if you could,
Smash Hits or *Top Of The Pops*?
Steven.

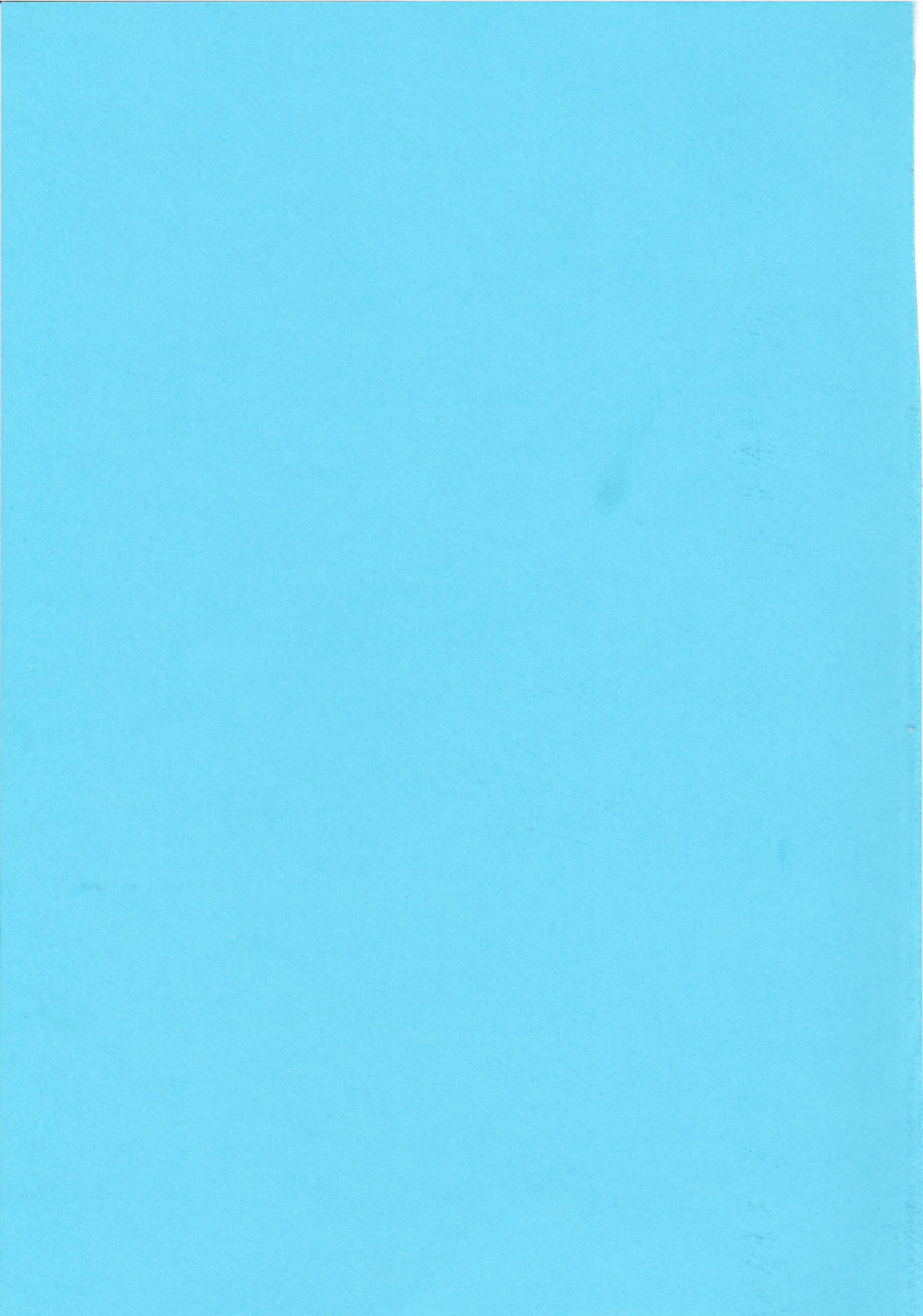
Chris: Has *Smash Hits* gone?

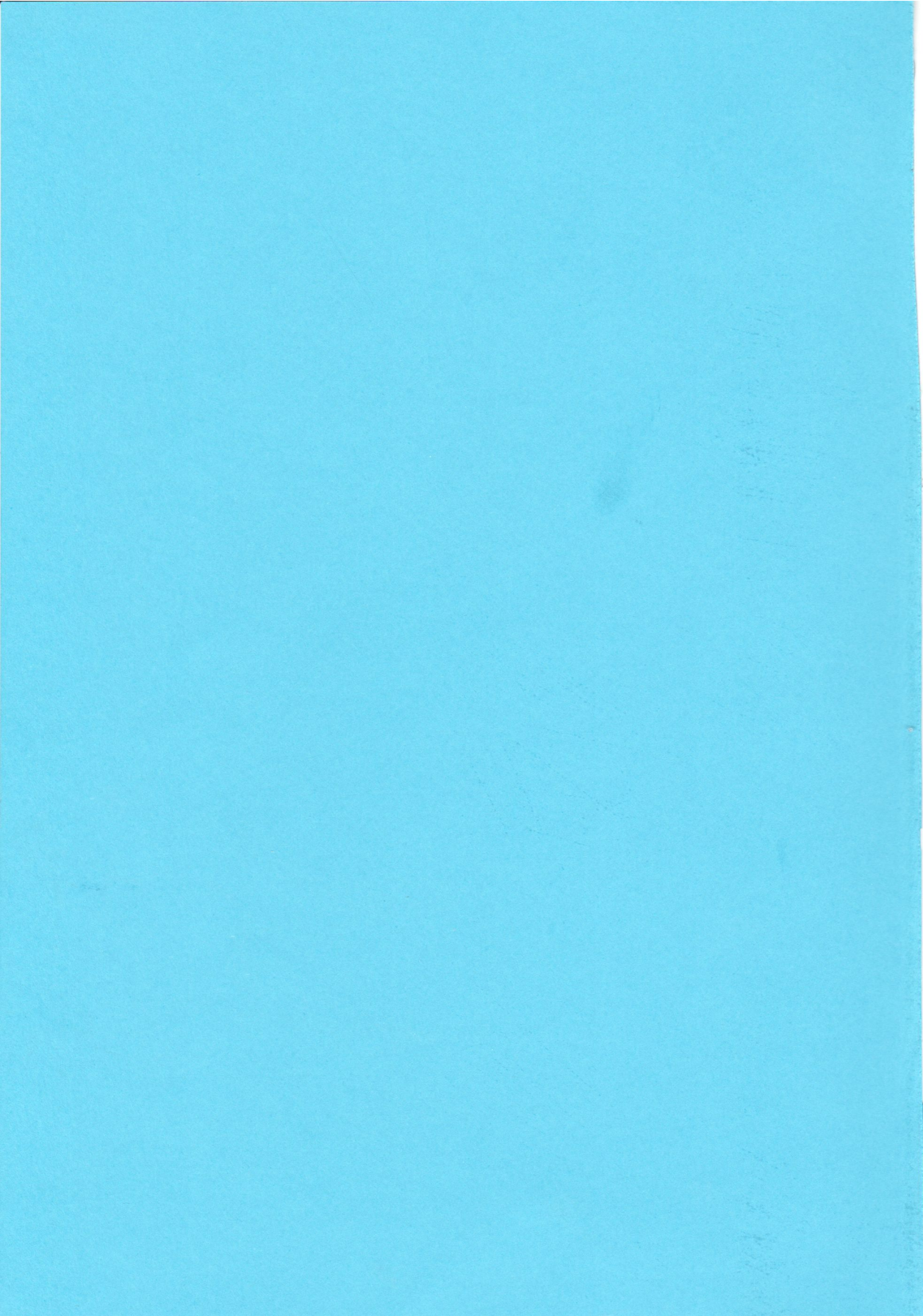
Neil: *Smash Hits* went ages ago. I think I would resurrect *Top Of The Pops*. I just don't know what's going on with physical magazines anymore. I'm out of the loop on that. But I think it's weird that in Britain on Christmas Day – the most important day of the year for television – they have an hour-long *Top Of The Pops* special. So they have a programme that's good enough to be on the most important day of the year, but not apparently for the other 51 weeks of the year. I think that's really weird. I don't think it necessarily even has to be called *Top Of The Pops* but we have a very lively chart nowadays, because of streaming and all the rest of it, and I think the BBC actually has a duty to have performances of all the pop songs that come along, which they had until 2007 when it finished. After that, there's all these people with careers, the Arctic Monkeys or someone, who've never been on *Top Of The Pops*, unless they were on *Christmas Top Of The Pops*. And that seems to me to be foolish. On British television they show old *Top Of The Pops* and they've been showing the late '80s recently. Occasionally I watch them at home, and I think what an amazing document of the time they are.

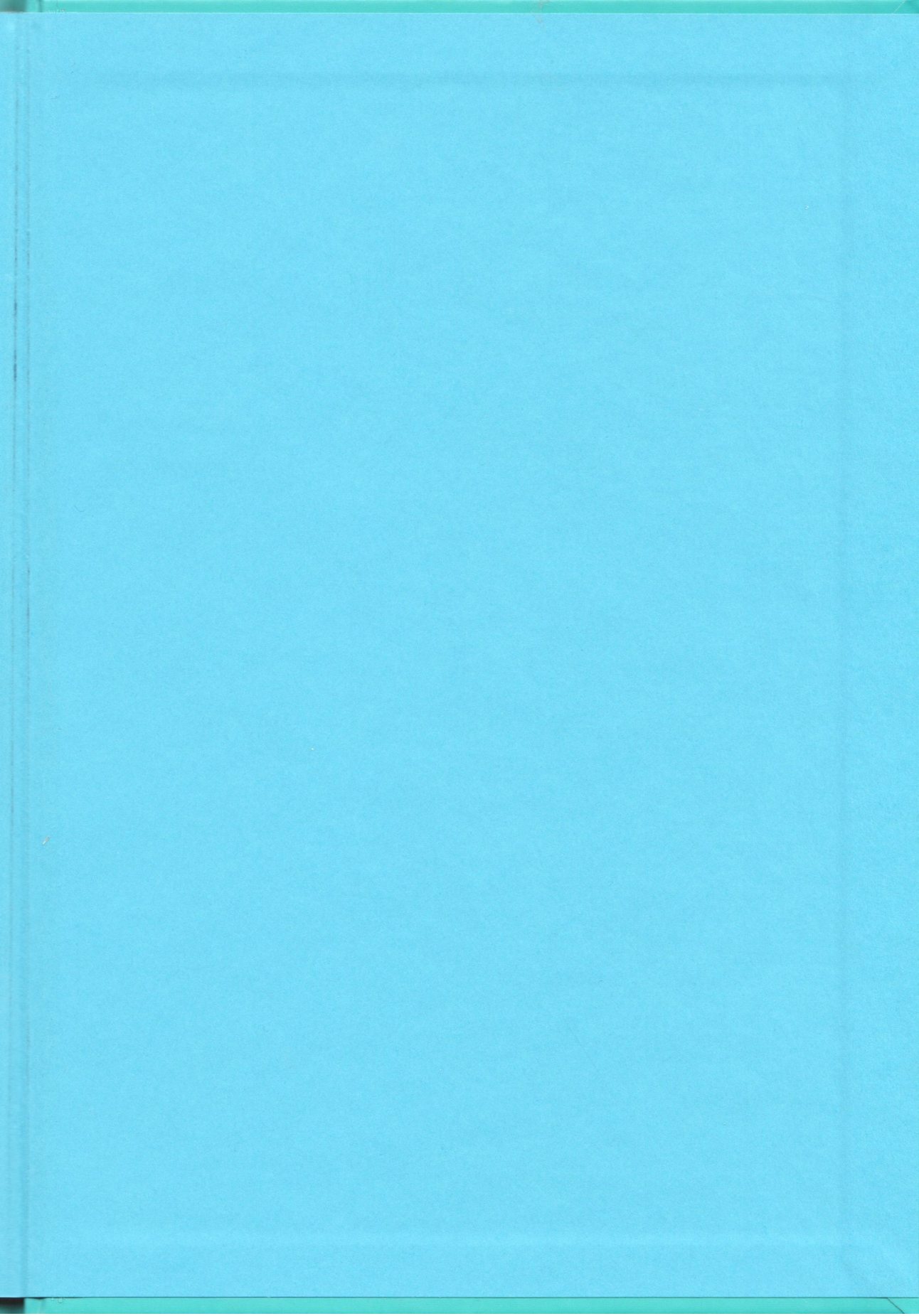
Chris: I agree with *Top Of The Pops*. The BBC had some pop TV show recently and it was awful.

Neil: I was actually called into the BBC to speak to some sort of gathering that was discussing bringing back *Top Of The Pops* quite a long time ago – probably ten years, or maybe longer. And they said that music had to be editorialised.

Chris: Another problem is that they would say that the kids don't watch television – they get everything online.







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